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Jane Sahi and Sujata Noronha
Editors

Published in 2015 by Bookworm, Goa

ISBN 978-81-923042-5-0

Typeset in AGaramond Pro

Printed and bound at Impressions, Belgaum.

MRP ₹ 300

Front cover photo source: Maxine Berntsen, Personal collection

Back cover photo source: Abhijit Varde, Daughters of Maharashtra

Design and Layout: Niju Mohan

Foreword

A few months ago when I spoke to Maxine on the phone she happened to mention that she was a little tired because she had been up the previous night until one in the morning helping a couple of students with their dissertations. This is typical of Maxine and there must be many students who would remember her tireless energy devoted to exacting the very best of their evolving thought and tentative expression. Maxine has spent a life-time supporting others in being creative and helping those who might be struggling with the language itself or grappling with new ideas or striving to articulate half-formed thoughts.

Maxine is, of course, equally demanding on herself as a writer and she continues to share her thoughts through clear and lucid writing. This small book of Maxine's own writings can capture no more than some "star fragments" from a varied life richly lived and still unfolding in surprising ways.

The title of this book, "Threading Texts within Contexts" is an effort to place Maxine's writings in the setting of key events and her own personal experiences. Maxine has recounted some of her most vivid memories from her childhood in Escanaba, on the shores of Lake Michigan in a family that had newly migrated from Norway, to the present moment in Hyderabad. Here she continues to take classes, engage with students, give talks, explore new ideas and delight in the view of the rocks from her window. In between there is an amazing medley of encounters with people, places, work, music and languages.

Freire writes about 'rigour' in academic writing. He concludes that 'rigour' does not mean abstract, disembodied thought but where theory is grounded in practice and practice is informed by theory. Maxine's writings are always embedded in a context of exploring further meanings for life as an undivided whole.

Yet, as Maxine quotes,

> *And what seems to be said between two people*
> *is only a small part of a complex conversation.*

The part that is sounded out and 'said' here is 'only a small part' or glimpse into a multi-layered, multi-faceted life. The world of her childhood is not lost in her reminiscences but has been added to, and extended, through her experience of living most of her life in India.

As Maxine began to share some of the significant happenings in her life many stories, poems and songs fell quite readily into place and seemed to flow out of the narrative. This book brings together a wide range of writings both in Marathi and English and gives a taste of some of the concerns that Maxine has been engaged in over a lifetime.

Some of these issues have emerged from childhood, like the relation of language to identity or the tensions between standard and non-standard language. Other recurring themes such as the complexity of communication and the link of culture to the learning and teaching of languages stem from Maxine's study of sociolinguistics at a time when the field was newly born in the 1950s at the University of Pennsylvania, popularly known as Penn. It was here that renowned scholars such as William Labov and Dell Hymes did pioneering work and Maxine was fortunate enough to be guided by them at that time of intense intellectual ferment.

Another over-arching theme that emerges is a commitment to equity where students have equal opportunities to study. Maxine's own experience as a young student who benefited from excellent teaching and being an integral part of"an intellectually vibrant and caring community" at Augsburg College, inspired the founding of Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan which continues to be committed to an inclusive admission policy and to providing a rich environment of learning across class, caste and religious differences.

Maxine's enduring involvement in schooling evolved in an organic way, beginning with her concern for particular children in Phaltan. Subsequently Maxine was active in the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, along with Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar, for over thirty years as Apli Shala and Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan grew and developed. Gradually there has been a greater reaching out to wider societal concerns as Maxine became increasingly aware of the challenge of "a collapse at the foundation" where young children are failed by a system to reach the barest rudiments of literacy.

This book deliberately includes a number of genres: first-person narrative accounts, poems of celebration, empathy and humour, articles and papers written related to different concerns, descriptions of methodology in language teaching, translations, and explorations into ideas. There is also an interview with Sharda, a woman of the Mahar community, that traces changing attitudes and ways of life. This interview is one segment of a project under the auspices of TISS, Mumbai that sought to collect oral histories documenting a wide range of women's lives in Maharashtra. These different styles of writing reflect just some of the varied aspects of Maxine's life as a poet, storyteller, listener, an academic, teacher and teacher of teachers.

Maxine is fond of quoting the lines of Yeats,

And you and I, and talked of poetry,
I said, a line may take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.

Some of the poems have just such an unstrained quality that they appear to be as free and spontaneous as "a moment's thought".

Maxine is an admirer of the poetry of the 18th century American poet, Emily Dickinson and shares her search for truth and integrity that is unbound by institutional forms of religiosity. Maxine's interests span a number of traditions and move above, between, through and beyond them to find what "speaks" to her so that she in turn can speak to others. Some of the poems are simultaneously a construction and de-construction of self. In a number of the earlier poems the first person is used, such as "I want to sing..." or "I am a planless house, built by each hand,/ That passes……." Gradually more distance is established as the construction of self is viewed from afar and with some healthy scepticism. There is, for example, a startling dethroning of the self in the poem beginning, "By daily contemplating /Itself…" that suggests only a 'Copernican upheaval' can 'wrest the Self from the center' and so acknowledge the Sun in its rightful place.

One of the books Maxine often refers to is "The Evolving Self" by Robert Kegan. In that book the author explores how a person grows through meetings. A number of poems are an imaginative entry into another's experience. The poem, "In the Last Ward" touches the pain and isolation of the mentally distraught, "I see one huddled there, /A frail cocoon/ Whose moth has fled/ Through twenty years of hurt…"

Some poems are very specifically directed at a particular person and time, such as the poems written in response to her friend Shelby, whose husband suffered from Alzheimer's. The poem beginning, "Something of Northwoods calm…" is dedicated to him and has been widely shared and appreciated in the U.S. by many affected directly and indirectly by the condition. Perhaps it is because this poem captures so poignantly a sense of dignity even in the face of seeming dissolution. It is often through a poem that Maxine is able to enter into another's pain but always with the sense that another's pain is beyond her own imaginings. (One poem begins, "We cannot reach another's pain…")

A number of poems explore the idea of dialogue such as "Communication" where it is described as "the touching of two spirits in the air", when like dancers "for an instant" they shared the same perspective as "the earth spun beneath their toes". In a later poem written after reading Buber's "I and Thou" Maxine writes that meeting friends is comparable to 'meeting trees', where there is an element of creative tension in coming to enjoy difference and otherness. One such formative meeting was with the extended family of the Satwalekars in Hyderabad, who Maxine first met in 1961 when she arrived in Hyderabad, and continues to be closely in touch with.

This book is a celebration of Maxine's energy and engagement with many lives. It weaves together the colourful and multi-textured strands of her life to form a rich tapestry of word and image. I hope that many may enjoy this book and that it will be especially treasured by those who have known Maxine as a friend and guide.

Jane Sahi,
September 2015

Escanaba (1935 – 1953)

Escanaba, Michigan

Escanaba, Michigan, USA
(Source: Wikipedia)

I was born in 1935 in Escanaba, a small town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Escanaba, and, for that matter, the whole Upper Peninsula is a place of extraordinary natural beauty. It is no longer the marvel it was several centuries ago when virgin evergreen forests covered much of the area, copper and iron ore were so abundant and so close to the surface that they could be literally scooped up. And the waters of Lake Michigan and Lake Superior – those inland fresh water oceans carved out by the receding glaciers – were pristine.

Due to greed and lack of foresight, the original paradise is no longer there. The virgin forest has been replaced by second growth, the mineral wealth has been depleted to a large extent. The water of Lake Michigan, where Escanaba is located, is contaminated by toxic chemicals, and the ecology of the lakes has been altered irreparably by the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway, which joined the Great Lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

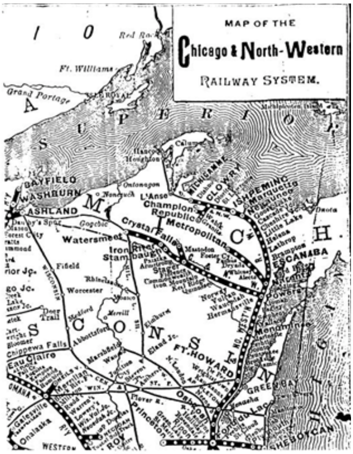
But it is still beautiful. And its history – from the age of the glaciers to the heyday of the lumber barons to the industrial age, and now the post-industrial age – is in some sense, part of my history as well. It provided the ecological context in which my parents worked and we children grew up – particularly my brother Gary and myself. And more and more I am realizing that the history and the landscape have shaped my imagination and writing as well.

Maxine and her brother Gary Berntsen (Source: Personal collection)

I have not written a single poem about Escanaba. But the images of the sea, of individuals being battered like small craft on a shoal, of finding havens (harbours) come over and over. I still remember the dream I had when I was in my teens. I was alone in a boat on Little Bay de Noc. The Little Bay is a fairly sheltered place, but I seemed to be heading into the Big Bay, and on to Green Bay and Lake Michigan itself. And perhaps from there to the wide, wide world.

It was not only the ecological context that was important, but the socioeconomic context as well. Escanaba was a town of 15000 people. There was a mixture of Catholics and Protestants. Many of the townspeople were recent immigrants, the Protestant immigrants largely from Scandinavia or Germany, and the Catholics from Poland or Croatia.

The town was built on a grid. It was divided by the rail road tracks into the South Side and the North Side. On the South Side, for the most part were the more established, better-off families, many of whom came from English or French backgrounds. The North Side – commonly known as Northtown, was literally on the 'wrong side of the tracks'. It was close to the ore docks, and there were many bars where sailors from the ore boats would come and drink at night. Drunken fights were common. It was, as Paul Sonnack, my professor from Augsburg College commented, "a tough part of town". This was where I grew up.


MAP OF THE
Chicago & North-Western
RAILWAY SYSTEM.
ESCANABA
ASHLAND
WASHBURN
BAYFIELD
ISHPEMING
MARQUETTE
GREEN BAY
FT. HOWARD
SHEBOYGAN
OSHKOSH

Railway track through Escanaba
(Source: Railway Archives)

My family

My father was an immigrant from Norway. He came to the United States in 1927, at the age of nineteen. For some time earlier he had been a seaman on the North Sea. Finally he decided to follow

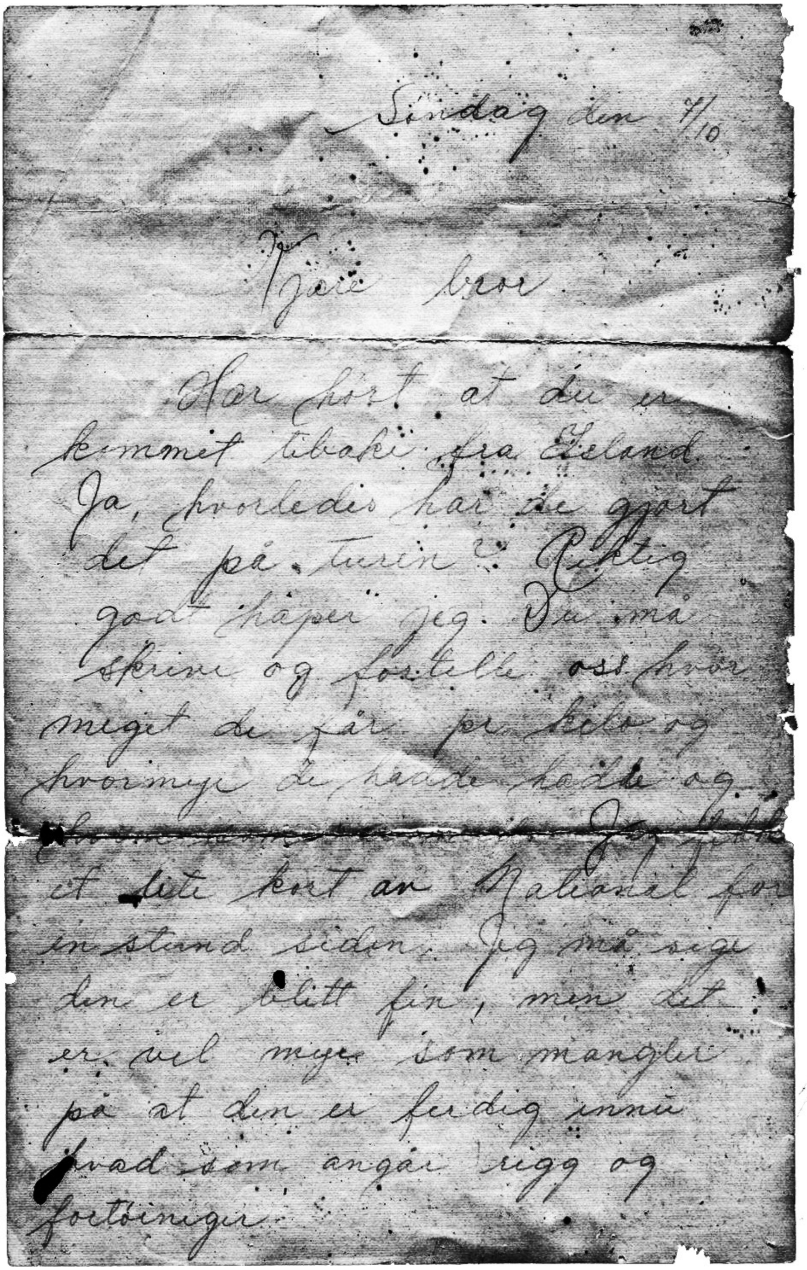
Maxine's father, John Berntsen
(Source: Personal collection)

his Uncle Einar and his brother Sverre who had come to America and settled in Escanaba four years earlier.

Like the majority of Norwegian immigrants of that time, they had come to America because times were hard in Norway. But things were not much better in America. The Great Depression had not officially started, but life was difficult for the newcomers. Just recently my cousin Inge in Norway, found a letter written by my father, John Berntsen from America in 1928, saying people emigrate thinking they'll get rich, but they find they have to continue to struggle.

A few years later Sverre contracted tuberculosis and was sent to the sanatorium. While he was there he wrote the typical Norwegian novel about the young man who went to America, got rich and returned to Norway to marry the pastor's daughter. Unfortunately in order to avoid the danger of contamination from tuberculosis he burned the manuscript. He died unmarried in 1933, two years before I was born. The story goes that he was engaged to two women at the time of his death !

My father had studied only up to the eighth grade in Norway. He told us that when he landed in New York he knew no English. He went into a restaurant to get something to eat. Since he couldn't read the menu card he would just point at something, and ate whatever the waiter brought.



Söndag den 7/10

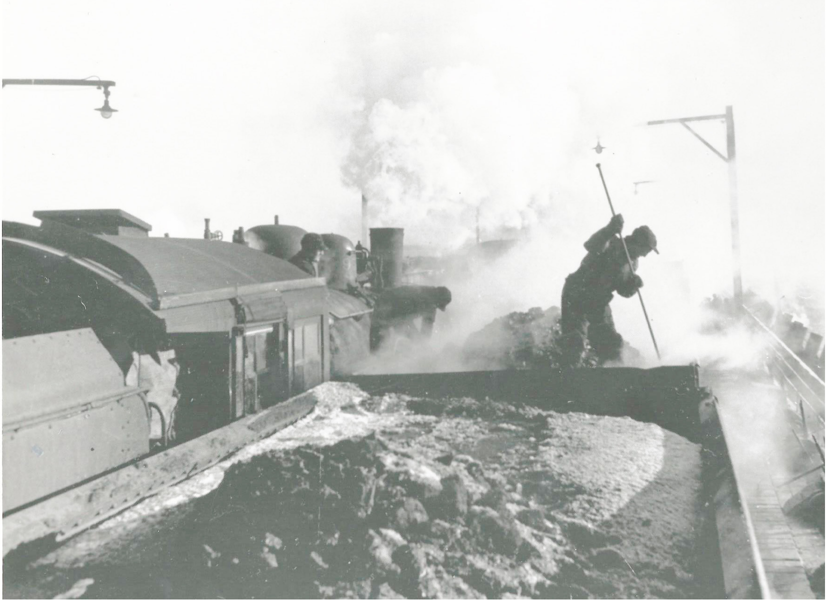
Kjære bror

Har hört at du er kommet tilbake fra Island. Ja, hvorledes har de gjort det på turen? Riktig godt håper jeg. Du må skrive og fortelle oss hvor meget de får pr. kilo og hvormye de hadde hadde og [illegible]. Jeg fikk et lite kort av National for en stund siden. Jeg må sige den er blitt fin, men det er vel mye som mangler på at den er ferdig ennu hvad som angår rigg og fortöininger.

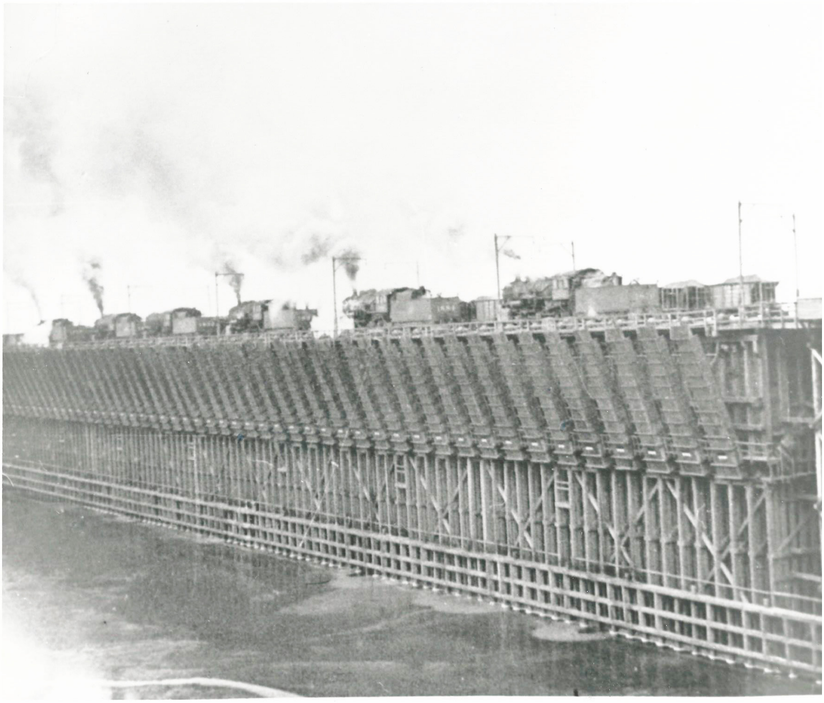
John Berntsen's letter to his family, 1928 (Source: Bernt Boe)

At the beginning he worked as a seaman on the iron ore boats that plied on the Great Lakes. However, after he got married, at my mother's insistence, he left sailing and took up a job on the Chicago and Northwestern ore docks in Escanaba.

The ore - big silvery chunks of hematite - came by rail from the Iron Range further north in Upper Michigan and from the Mesabi Range in northeastern Minnesota. In Escanaba it was loaded onto the ships that came up to the dock. The bottom of the ore car was opened so that the ore could fall into a pocket on the dock, and from there it could be loaded onto the ship. However, the rocks did not easily flow into the pocket. Men called ore punchers stood on top of the ore car and hit the rocks with pikes. My dad was an ore puncher, and he revelled in the danger of his job.



Maxine's father, John Berntsen (Source: Gary Berntsen)



Ore docks (Source: Gary Berntsen)

As the quality of the ore declined and the technology changed, Daddy learned welding so that he could repair the semi-automatic equipment used for loading the ore. He loved his work. I remember him saying, "I can't wait to get to work in the morning. There'll be two pieces of broken metal, and NO BOOK will teach you how to put them together. You just have to study them and figure it out for yourself." Still later the quality of the ore further declined, and taconite, a fine powder, was loaded onto the ships. The loading was done with huge cranes. At the end of his life, Daddy became a crane operator, and he boasted that he could load more tons of ore in an hour than any of the younger guys. In addition to working on the dock he also did house painting and commercial fishing. In whatever free time he had he would go hunting and fishing.

My mother was born in the United States in a village called Kipling, thirteen miles from Escanaba. Her parents had both come from Finland. As far as I recall, Grandpa worked as a labourer at the tie plant where railroad ties were manufactured and treated. Grandma gave birth to twelve children, of whom nine - five girls and four boys - survived up to adulthood. Their first language was Finnish. In fact, there were so many Finns in Kipling that I've heard that even the Croatian kids spoke Finnish.

Maxine's mother, Ailia Berntsen (Source: Personal collection)

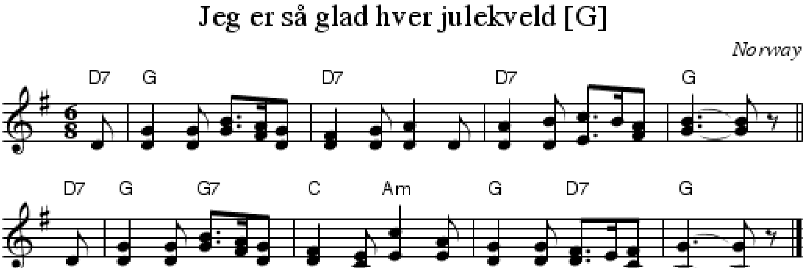
Grandma, however, learnt English fluently and we rarely heard her speak Finnish. Grandpa, on the other hand, rarely spoke English, and as my brother and I knew no Finnish, we had little conversation with him. However I remember, when we were very little he used to bounce us up and down on his knee as he recited a poem in Finnish. Many years later at Columbia I recited the poem to a Finnish woman I met. She laughed and said, "Don't recite that in polite company."

From my mother we also learnt a couple of Finnish songs like - '*mina van tiskan asti oyta*' and '*kikurikakuri*'. The first is a housemaid's song and the second is a song about a cat. When I sang '*mina van tiskan*' to a Finnish woman in the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, she commented wryly that this was the song that all the immigrants sang.

My mother studied up to the twelfth grade in Gladstone, a town eight miles from Escanaba. As far as I know, of all her siblings only she and her youngest sister completed high school. Mama was an outstanding student, and particularly enjoyed math. After graduating from high school she took a secretarial course, and then became a secretary for a local lawyer. She must have been very good at her work, because when her boss decided to shift to Lower Michigan, he asked her to come there and continue to work for him. However, by that time she had decided to marry my dad, so she declined.

My guess, though, is that she always regretted having to give up her job. At times she did volunteer work - keeping the accounts for the church - and during World War II she worked as a clerk in a nearby grocery store. Along with math, she loved language - especially word games like Scrabble. She and my youngest sister, Cathy could always beat me.

Singing was a big part of our life, both in our immediate family and in my mother's family. She and her siblings sang well, and in harmony. The impromptu harmonising they could do was a skill I never mastered. In our own family, we would spend the weekend at a hunting camp in the woods. One of the most memorable parts of these trips was our singing together in the car all the way home. On Christmas Eve as we sat around the tree, we sang carols, Daddy singing in Norwegian and us in English. One of the Norwegian carols I loved was, '*Jeg er saa glad hver Julekveld'* (I am so glad each Christmas Eve). Our session always ended with 'Silent Night' simultaneously in English and Norwegian.



Source: www.abcnotation.com

The interesting thing is that I didn't really understand the meaning of the songs we sang either in Finnish or Norwegian but the melodies and a fair approximation of the pronunciation stayed in my memory. I think that some of my love for language, songs and their lyrics came from this early experience. Not only did I enjoy listening to the sounds of language for its own sake, but I was really sensitive to the social nuances of speech variation. A foreign accent like that of my father's was something to be proud of, but pronouncing brother as 'brudder' as some of our neighbours did, made me cringe as this was considered uneducated speech.

Maxine's uncle Einar and aunt Sophie
(Source: Personal collection)

Perhaps even more powerful than the language and song I heard at home was the language and song of the church. Though my parents were not much interested in the church, my dad's uncle Einar was not only a regular member of the church but he was the janitor. I remember that when I was about five, Uncle came over and announced to my mother that it was time to send Maxie to Sunday School, and she did. Uncle took me every Sunday.

UNCLE

I always think of Uncle as a tall man. The last time I was home I saw him standing next to several boys and realized he isn't tall at all. Still, though he seems tall, even though his back is hunched with age and from the time when he fell off a ladder several years ago.

Maybe I think of him as tall because he is so thin. But part of the reason, I think is that he stands out so sharply when I recall my childhood.

Uncle has been old ever since I knew him. He's not my uncle really, but my dad's. But Daddy always called him Uncle so we did the same thing.

One day, a little after my fourth birthday, he came over to see my mother, " Ailia," he said, " it's time to send Maxie to Sunday School." He didn't suggest it . He told her. So I started Sunday School.

I was so proud that Uncle was janitor in the church. That meant he knew everything that was going on and was a good friend of the minister. On the way home from services, I sat in the back of the car while he, Auntie, and Mrs. Ole Anderson discussed the sermon, the Catholics, the Swedes, and the young people. Usually he didn't say much. He just sat back and listened. But sometimes he was hurt and angry, especially about the way the younger members were trying to run the church or the assistant janitor just tried to run around looking important. When he became very excited , he broke into Norwegian, talking rapidly and emphatically.

It wasn't until Auntie died that I realized how much she had meant to him. I was still little and had an idea that he might be almost relieved to be free from her sharp tongue. But he wasn't. He seemed like a lost man. His face, always thin, looked thinner. He looked older, more bent. But he worked harder than ever. He lived alone in the huge house, with its three upstairs bedrooms and bathroom. Just as Auntie had done, he kept everything spotless and in its place. Even the storm shed was so shining clean that I always scraped my feet first on the sidewalk outside. He kept his big lawn neatly trimmed and his garden carefully weeded and watered.

A short time after Auntie's death he came to see me. He took a little velvet-covered box from his pocket and handed it to me. " Maxie, I want you to have these." They were Auntie's wedding and engagement rings.

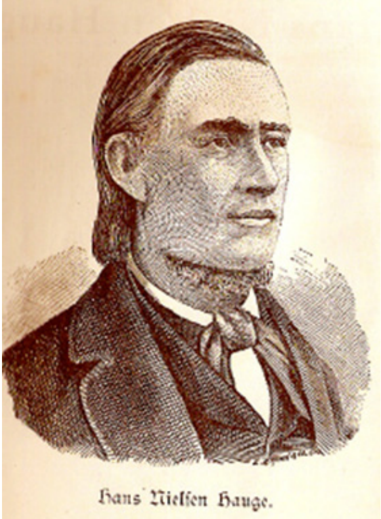
He adored my little sister, Julie. When he came over he usually had a bag of candy for her hidden in his pocket. Then he would call her over in the corner and ask her if she'd exchange a kiss for the candy. Sometimes he would hold her in his lap and talk to her. She talked and laughed freely with him, with none of the stiffness my brother or I felt. Often he would run his fingers through her hair and say, " You are the best vun."

He didn't mean that he didn't like the rest of us. But I think he always felt that we could never quite get rid of the barrier of age like Julie could. He often invited us over for little parties with ice-cream, cookies, and coffee. There were usually stiff, uncomfortable occasions unless Daddy was there or until Uncle and Mama started to serve the lunch. Still he asked us again and again, and was very hurt if we refused.

He had a secret too. One day he came and told me he had something in his garage he wanted me to see. I asked what but he was very mysterious and insisted that I come and find out. When we got to the garage he went over to the corner and pulled out a large painting of a Viking ship, fairly well done. " Vell, what do you think of it?" I told him it was rather good, but asked who did it. He smiled slyly and evaded the question. He wanted to enter it in the fair, he said and wondered if I thought he should. I told him yes and insisted again that he tell me if he had painted the picture. But although he did enter it, he never would tell the name of the artist.

My going to college has always been one of Uncle's big dreams. The day before I left for school last year, he came over to say goodbye. He handed me an envelope and put out his hand. I could see he was ready to cry. We shook hands and abruptly he turned and left.

The music and the words of the liturgy, the congregational and choral singing and the format and style of the sermons, all made a deep impression on me. It was, of course, not only in terms of language and music that the church made an impression. Ours was the Lutheran Free Church, a denomination that had its roots in its opposition to the State Church in Norway. It had its links with a movement that started in Norway in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century under the leadership of a lay preacher named Hans Nielsen Hauge. Hauge went from farmstead to farmstead preaching personal revival along with a strong message for improvement of workers' rights and wages. This combination of pietism and social activism was a strong theme at Augsburg, the college of the Lutheran Free Church, and in the college that I later went to.

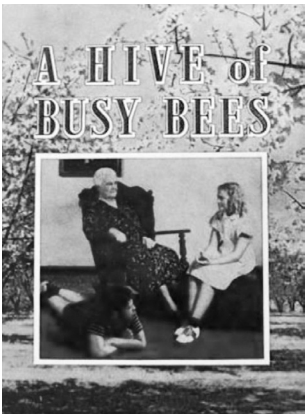

Hans Nielſen Hauge.

Hans Nielsen Hauge
(Source: Wikipedia)

Since my dad's mother tongue was Norwegian, and my mother's was Finnish, the only common language was English. I deeply regret that I didn't learn either language as a child. But we did learn some songs. One of the most memorable was 'En kalt og sturmful vinter nacht' ('One cold and stormy winter night') – a song sung by a seaman saying farewell to his beloved as he returns to the North Sea.

Books and stories

We didn't have many children's books at home. Even today I repeatedly discover how many of the classics of children's literature I missed – "Winnie the Pooh", "The Wind in the Willows", "Alice in Wonderland", to name a few. But my parents told us stories about their own lives, as well as the traditional folk tales. I particularly loved Daddy's stories about his life in Norway, like the time he went swimming in a mountain pool and came out full of leeches. He told the story of the farmer who stole a baby eagle from its nest, and whose baby was in turn carried away by the eagle.



(Source: www.lemelder.blogspot.in)

Mama must have wanted to provide us with more books. When a salesman from a Christian publishing company came to the door she bought a book called "A Hive of Busy Bees".

The stories were moralistic - Be kind, Be gentle, etc. In one story a mother had made doughnuts. The older brother told the younger one that he would eat the doughnuts and the younger one could have the holes. Hearing this, the mother made little round cakes the size of doughnut holes, frosted them and gave them to the little one. One or two had a suggestion of the exotic. The one that struck me was about a Western boy who was suffering from malaria in a tropical country.

Later when I could read on my own I read “Little Women”. I enjoyed books about ships and adventure. “Treasure Island” was my favourite. I also loved books about sports. There was a series of books by John R. Tunis - all with male characters except one which was called “Champion’s Choice”. It was about a woman tennis player who had to decide whether she would pursue a career in tennis or marry. Finally she married.

At some point I also started to love poetry. One of my early favorites was Robert Louis Stevenson’s ‘The Swing’, and later Edna St. Vincent Millay’s ‘The Railroad Track is Miles Away’. I also loved the long narrative poems by Henry Wordsworth Longfellow: ‘The Courtship of Miles Standish’, ‘The Wreck of the Hesperus’, and, best of all, ‘The Song of Hiawatha’. Wonderfully, it was set in Upper Michigan.

By the shores of Gitchee Gumee.
By the shining Big Sea Water
Stood the wigwam of Nokomis.

‘Gitchee Gumee’ ; was Lake Superior. Most thrilling of all was that the Indian hero, Hiawatha “crossed the rushing Escanaba”. The glory was that a major American poet had celebrated my part of the country !

Throughout my schooling I had a group of friends, but I never had a ‘best friend’ - someone I could share my thoughts and dreams with. I was also very competitive - both in academics and in sports - and highly moralistic. My first poem, which I almost hesitate to share, was didactic. It went like this:

Peace, that state of perfect bliss

Is seldom found through idleness,

And though your job be meek and low,

Seeds of peace there you may sow.

The memory I have of composing this poem is that I was standing outside under a lamp post on a winter night, watching the snow fall. I can't say whether this is a true memory or an imagined one. But the picture in my mind is vivid.

Schooling

Along with the church, the schools I went to - grade school, Junior High School, and Senior High School had a significant effect on me. The Escanaba school system was a government-run system for practically all the children in the community. Only a small minority of children went to the private Catholic school. This meant that all children, no matter what their social background, were going to a common school.

The grade schools were neighbourhood schools, so there was perhaps some social differentiation among schools in various parts of town. However, even in our school in Northtown, the fathers of many of my friends were businessmen, professionals or managers in the local industries. Moreover, on the level of the Junior High School and the Senior High School there was only one school for all the students in town. The experience of this common schooling has been very important to me and served as the basis for my vision of the school I later started in Phaltan.

The didactic poem I quoted above was possibly written when I was about 11 - that is about 1946. Historically this was a crucial period. The war had just ended. During the war many married women entered the work force for the first time, a change that altered the family dynamics in many households. During the war my mother's brothers had fought - one or two in Europe, some in the Pacific.

On a personal level I shifted to the Junior High School. It was more intellectually challenging because there were specialised teachers for each subject. I started becoming aware of social inequalities and of the folly of war. I read Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* and was appalled by the descriptions of abject poverty. The main plot has not remained in my mind, but I still remember the beautiful Fantine, who sold her hair and then her teeth to get money for her ailing child. When the French teacher asked us where we would like to travel, I said, "The slums of Paris." She was at a loss as to how to respond.

I also wrote a poem about war. My recollection was that it was while I was in Junior High, but more likely it was written while I was in the eleventh grade.

Oh, love thy neighbor, Mother dear
And send your son to slay him.
He might come back, Oh Mother dear,
But cannons must be fed, you know,
And factories too must not go broke,
And smoke stacks must keep making smoke.
So kiss him gently, take his hand,
He's fighting for his native land.

This was not appreciated by my teacher.

The most dramatic event of my Junior High School years was my falling ill and suffering complete paralysis due to Guillian Barre syndrome. My parents had given me permission to attend the Luther League convention in Medicine Lake, a conference center outside of Minneapolis. It was five hundred miles from Escanaba, and I had never gone so far on my own.

Three thousand young people from the Upper Midwest converged on Medicine Lake. The theme song of the convention was a hymn by John B. Dykes: 'My Hope is Built on Nothing Less Than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness'. It was a heady experience to hear and participate in the singing of the theme song. In regard to the organisers' perspective on training young people for leadership roles, however, I had some reservations.

The weather was cold and rainy. My accommodation was in a lodge on the shore of the lake. We were offered extra blankets, and most people took them. But I felt that I was a Norwegian fisherman's daughter and I had no need for any extra warmth.

The day I left it was raining heavily. When I got on the train my clothes were drenched, and I had no option but to sleep in wet clothes – huddled up on the seat of the train. In the morning I got up and went to the bathroom. As I walked I could feel my knees buckling.

The train went as far as Gladstone, where my uncle came and picked me up. I slept at his house for some time, then he drove me home to Escanaba. There was nobody home. I lay down and slept a while. Then the phone rang. I got up to answer it, but I fell down and couldn't get up.

By that time my mother came home. She called doctor after doctor, but could not contact anybody, as it was Labor Day – a national holiday. Finally she got hold of Dr. Louis Groos, an elderly physician. He came at once. As soon as he examined me, he said it looked like polio. However, the local hospital would not take suspect polio cases, so I would have to go to the government hospital in Marquette, sixty miles away.

By that time I was completely paralysed from the neck down. I could not as much as wiggle a finger. Fortunately, I had no trouble breathing.

An ambulance was arranged and I was taken to Marquette. Mama had just had my sister Julie a month before. She must have come with me to Marquette, but couldn't stay. After taking a spinal tap the doctors ruled out polio, but couldn't come up with a diagnosis. After a couple of weeks they decided to send me to the University Hospital in Ann Arbor, five hundred miles downstate from Escanaba.

In Ann Arbor I was put in the paediatrics ward. At some point the doctors concluded that I had contracted Guillian Barre (GB) syndrome, a viral infection similar to polio. In those days it wasn't known that GB syndrome can be treated with cortisone. The only treatment available was physiotherapy, so I was sent for therapy every day. In addition the hospital school arranged for me to be tutored in French and Algebra.

Physically I was completely helpless. But I wasn't frightened. Somehow I had faith that I was going to get better. Perhaps some people found this combination of total helplessness and utter confidence unnerving. There was one nurse in particular – a strikingly beautiful woman – who clearly did not like me; and I did not like her. Then there was the well-meaning but obtuse French teacher who looked down at me, saying, "What a blessing it did not affect your brain!" One nurse in the Marquette hospital takes the prize for the worst comment, "I bet if this bed caught on fire you'd get up soon enough!"

I was also frustrated when I asked for some classical music to listen to. I may have said Tschaikovsky. So they asked me what I knew about Tschaikovsky, and since I didn't have anything to say, I didn't get the music.

Of course, not everyone was so negative. The people in physiotherapy were supportive and fun. When I left the hospital the man who assisted me in the water tank wrote in my autograph book, "She was a nice girl but she wouldn't stay put in the tank." There was one nurse who was a deeply spiritual woman and it was good to connect with her. The most memorable and supportive person I met was a woman doctor. She was from Quebec and came from a Catholic background. However, she was very critical of the Catholic Church which she said built huge cathedrals and left the people in the villages in poverty.

The expenses for my hospital stay were covered by my father's insurance. When that ran out, the hospital decided to send me back to Escanaba. There was no public health system and the Government gave no support – neither financial nor guidance in such cases. So my mother had two 'babies' to take care of. I still cannot imagine how she managed. In addition, on her own she began to gather information on treatment options for me. I remember she talked to one woman who had two girls with polio, and from what the woman said mama gathered that I should be given some form of exercise. She called a chiropractor and he treated me a few times. Then she found out that there was a physiotherapy department at the Junior High School. So she managed to get me enrolled in that. It still amazes me that there was no state support even in terms of access for information. Looking back I am also amazed at the determination, intelligence and efficiency which Mama displayed at this time. Until that time, I had always thought my father is the stronger of the two, but I realized that in a crisis Daddy got scared and Mama was the one who handled the situation.

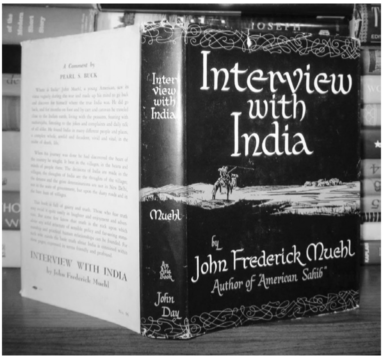
Daddy had two jobs and was not in a position to take me anywhere, so as soon as I was able to sit up and use my hands again a man named Clarence Larson, the father of one of my friends, would come and pick me up and carry me to the car and got me involved with everything. He even took me to football games.

During the year when I was at home, my mother tutored me, especially in algebra, so that the next year I was able to go in to the tenth grade although I had completely missed the ninth. Meanwhile, physiotherapy was stopped when the government gave an edict that all polio patients should not be treated any longer because of the low cost-benefit ratio. In September 1950, I started school using two Canadian crutches (forearm elbow crutches made of metal). After some months, I was able to discard both of them. For the most part, I had recovered although there was some wastage in the muscles of my hands, and I had a bilateral foot drop.

Desire to go to India

When people ask me how I decided to come to India I generally start by telling them about my experience in the eleventh grade. There was an adult education lecture series in the Senior High School titled ‘The United States in World Affairs’. I can’t remember what any of the other speakers talked about but I still vividly remember the lecture by a journalist named John Muehl. He had come to India shortly after Independence and travelled around the country side talking to people. He described how India was trying to develop democratically, in contrast to China which had chosen the communist route. To this day, I can see Muehl standing at the lectern.

The next year, in the twelfth grade we had to write a research paper, and I did mine on ‘Problems of Rural India’. I read the five books on India in the public library, including Muehl’s “Interview with India”.

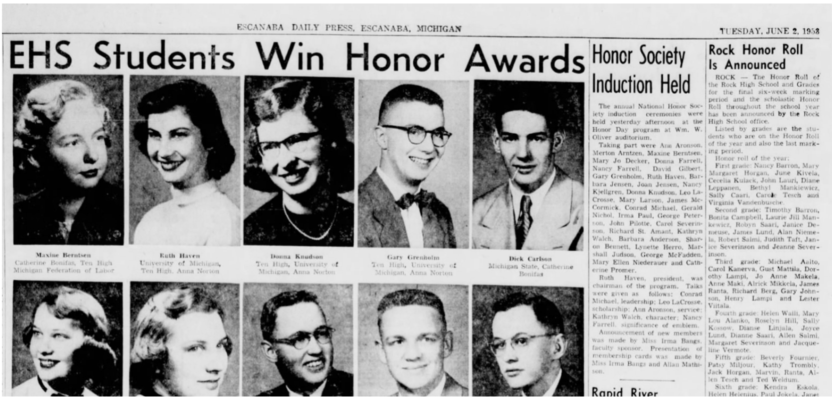

A Comment by
PEARL S. BUCK
INTERVIEW WITH INDIA
by John Frederick Muehl
Interview with India
Muehl
An Asia Book
John Day
Interview with India
by John Frederick Muehl
Author of American Sahib

(Source: www.rarebookcellar.com)

In my handwritten paper, I described the attempts India was making to develop in the fields of agriculture, health and education. From the time of hearing Muehl’s talk I had decided that one day I would go to India and see this significant social experiment. The next year when I went to college I still knew that I wanted to go to India sometime.

As I look back on my experience in Senior High I am especially struck by the quality of the writing instruction we had. As I recall we wrote a lot, and the teachers corrected our papers with great care. I am especially grateful to Miss Nina Ley, our journalism teacher, who blue-pencilled every unnecessary sentence or word. One summer I also had the opportunity to work as a proof reader on the Escanaba Daily Press. This probably helped develop my minor obsession with punctuation.

In June of 1953 I graduated from Escanaba Senior High School. I was proud to be a member of the Mortarboard Honor Society. I had received a Catherine Bonifas Scholarship and also won a $500 prize for topping a state wide examination on 'Labor and the Law'. This financial help plus the assistance from my father made it possible for me to go to Augsburg College in Minneapolis.



ESCANABA DAILY PRESS, ESCANABA, MICHIGAN

TUESDAY, JUNE 2, 1953

EHS Students Win Honor Awards

Maxine Berntsen
Catherine Bonifas, Ten High
Michigan Federation of Labor

Ruth Haven
University of Michigan,
Ten High, Anna Norton

Donna Knudson
Ten High, University of
Michigan, Anna Norton

Gary Grenholm
Ten High, University of
Michigan, Anna Norton

Dick Carlson
Michigan State, Catherine
Bonifas

Honor Society Induction Held

The annual National Honor Society induction ceremonies were held yesterday afternoon at the Honor Day program at Wm. W. Oliver auditorium.

Taking part were Ann Aronson, Merton Arntzen, Maxine Berntsen, Mary Jo Decker, Donna Farrell, Nancy Farrell, David Gilbert, Gary Grenholm, Ruth Haven, Barbara Jensen, Joan Jensen, Nancy Kjellgren, Donna Knudson, Leo LaCrosse, Mary Larson, James McCormick, Conrad Michael, Gerald Nichol, Irma Paul, George Peterson, John Pilotte, Carol Severinson, Richard St. Amant, Kathryn Walch, Barbara Anderson, Sharon Bennett, Lynette Herro, Marshall Judson, George McFadden, Mary Ellen Niederauer and Catherine Promer.

Ruth Haven, president, was chairman of the program. Talks were given as follows: Conrad Michael, leadership; Leo LaCrosse, scholarship; Ann Aronson, service; Kathryn Walch, character; Nancy Farrell, significance of emblem.

Announcement of new members was made by Miss Irma Bangs, faculty sponsor. Presentation of membership cards was made by Miss Irma Bangs and Allan Mathison.

Rapid River

Rock Honor Roll Is Announced

ROCK — The Honor Roll of the Rock High School and Grades for the final six-week marking period and the scholastic Honor Roll throughout the school year has been announced by the Rock High School office.

Listed by grades are the students who are on the Honor Roll of the year and also the last marking period.

Honor roll of the year:

First grade: Nancy Barron, Mary Margaret Horgan, June Kivela, Cecelia Kulack, John Lauri, Diane Leppanen, Bethyl Mankiewicz, Sally Caari, Carole Tesch and Virginia Vandenbusche.

Second grade: Timothy Barron, Bonita Campbell, Laurie Jill Mankewicz, Robyn Saari, Janice Demeuse, James Lund, Alan Niemela, Robert Salmi, Judith Taft, Janice Severinson and Jeanne Severinson.

Third grade: Michael Aalto, Carol Kanerva, Gust Mattila, Dorothy Lampi, Jo Anne Makela, Anne Maki, Alrick Mikkela, James Ranta, Richard Berg, Gary Johnson, Henry Lampi and Lester Viitala.

Fourth grade: Helen Walli, Mary Lou Alanko, Roselyn Hill, Sally Kossow, Dianse Linjala, Joyce Lund, Dianne Saari, Allen Salmi, Margaret Severinson and Jacqueline Vermote.

Fifth grade: Beverly Fournier, Patsy Miljour, Kathy Trombly, Jack Horgan, Marvin, Ranta, Allen Tesch and Ted Weldum.

Sixth grade: Kendra Eskola, Helen Helenius, Paul Jokela, Janet

The Escanaba Daily Press, June 2nd 1953
(Source: www.newspapers.com)

Augsburg College (1953- 1957)

MGM
AUGSBURG COLLEGE & SEMINARY

Augsburg College (Source: Augsburg College Archives)

Augsburg College in Minneapolis was the one and only college supported by the Lutheran Free Church, with which I had been associated since childhood. Most of the students came from families of Norwegian background in Minnesota, Wisconsin and North Dakota. It's probably fair to say that the students at Augsburg came from less well off families than their counterparts in more famous Lutheran schools of the Midwest: St. Olaf, Gustavus Adolphus, Concordia, and Luther.

Almost certainly it was the most socially committed of the colleges in this group. I have already mentioned the lay movement of Hans Nielsen Hauge who combined emphasis on personal religious experience and social justice.

AUGSBURG CO

Dr. Bernhard M. Christensen
(Source: The Five Lessons of Bernhard M. Christensen)

Dr. Bernhard M. Christensen was the President of both Augsburg College and Seminary from 1938 to 1962. Like Hauge he believed in the active participation of the laity in the church – what he called 'living congregations'. He was inclined to mysticism, but he felt that more important than the enjoyment of the mystical experience was working for the coming of the kingdom of God.

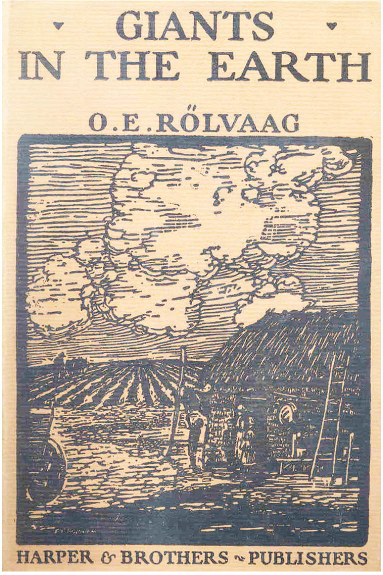
I don't know if this brief description gives some sense of the framework of our experience of Augsburg. It was an intellectually vibrant and caring community, and the spiritual ethos delineated by Christensen was a part of the life of the place, though varying in degree from time to time and person to person.

The Augsburg faculty saw their role mainly as teaching rather than doing research. And teach they did – with dedication and passion ! Perhaps the most passionate was Paul Sonnack, theologian and church historian, and a close associate of Dr. Christensen. Sonnack's course, "The Christian Faith in the Modern World" was one of the most memorable courses I studied at Augsburg. Paul Sonnack challenged us to look at our social commitment and pointed out that in many ways the Humanists had a better record on this score than the Lutheran Church. He was scornful of self-righteous Fundamentalists. In a sense he was conservative as he felt that people should develop their spirituality in terms of their own religious tradition rather than casually taking up exotic cults from elsewhere on the globe.

Joel Torstensen
(Source: www.augsburg.edu)

Another unforgettable teacher was Joel Torstensen, who taught Social Psychology. I had never even heard of a domain called social psychology before taking Torstensen's course. But I think that over the years I realize more and more that what I learned from Torstensen about the development of the self in a social context has helped to form my thinking in a significant way. Torstensen was also a committed social activist. The Augsburg campus is in the middle of Minneapolis and very close to impoverished neighbourhoods of Native Americans. For years he directed efforts in which college students could reach out to the Native American community.

As I was an English major I had the privilege of taking several courses from two outstanding teachers. One was Dr. Gerald (Jerry) Thorson who was head of the department. Jerry Thorson's passion was the Norwegian-American novel – novels written by Norwegian immigrants living in America. Some of these were written first in Norwegian and then later translated into English. The most famous is O.E Rolvaag's "Giants in the Earth". Thorson taught us American Literature, The British Novel and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. I loved hearing him read Chaucer aloud. To my mind it sounded like English spoken with a Scandinavian accent. I will never forget when he read the 'Wife of Bath's Tale'. He did not edit out the bawdy parts, but blushed furiously as he read them. Jerry and his wife Anneliese had five children, and my friends and I often went to their house to visit.



Giants in the Earth
(Source: Wikipedia)

The most extraordinary teacher I had at Augsburg was Anne Pederson. I still remember one of my first days at Augsburg. My classmates and I were discussing our new classes and teachers. I said there was one I was not so sure about. Her name was Anne

Pederson. Mary Ann Braseth said, “ She is my aunt.” However, it didn’t take long to discover what a marvellous mind and spirit there was in this tiny woman. She was absolutely dedicated to her work. She said once that she could not remember a single day when she came to her class unprepared.

As a teacher she was very clear and demanding. Like my High School teacher Miss Ley, she stressed the need to keep one’s writing simple and straightforward. She also gave us the opportunity to look back at the experiences of childhood. My essay on Uncle Einar must have been written for her class.

Anne Pederson
(Source: Personal collection)

Once when Miss Pederson asked us to write a character sketch, I wrote about her, She asked us to read our essays aloud, so I did. I can’t recall all of it, but it started like this:

> I didn’t like her at first. Each word was too precise, each action too cold and formal. It took me a week to realize that she had more than one suit. They were all brown. Her hair was brown too, and I thought she must live a brown sort of life.

When I finished she removed her glasses, smiled and said, “Shall I sit under the table while you discuss this?” From an academic point of view the biggest gift Miss Pederson gave me was teaching me how to read and make sense of a difficult poem. I can remember exactly when ‘the penny dropped’. She was teaching Mathew Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ which goes back and forth between a description of the calm English Channel on a moonlit night, his reflection on the current situation with war about to start in Europe, a comparison of Sophocles’ experience of the Aegean Sea, the loss of faith and a declaration of love. Somehow the way Ms. Pederson guided us through the poem taught me to understand how to approach a complex poem.

She was not only a skilful teacher, but a gracious host and friend. The doors of her home were open for us for coffee and sometimes for meals. Once a year a group of us would go to her home for a Sunday ‘brunch’ in which the menu was always scrambled eggs and popovers. Some of us still remember the year the popovers didn’t pop. A student named Ron Main described them as those “miserable little lumps.” These were, of course, happy times. I also remember that on at least one or two occasions we went to her home late at night for her counsel and support in an existential crisis.

At one point I wrote a poem dedicated to her.

TO ANNE PEDERSON

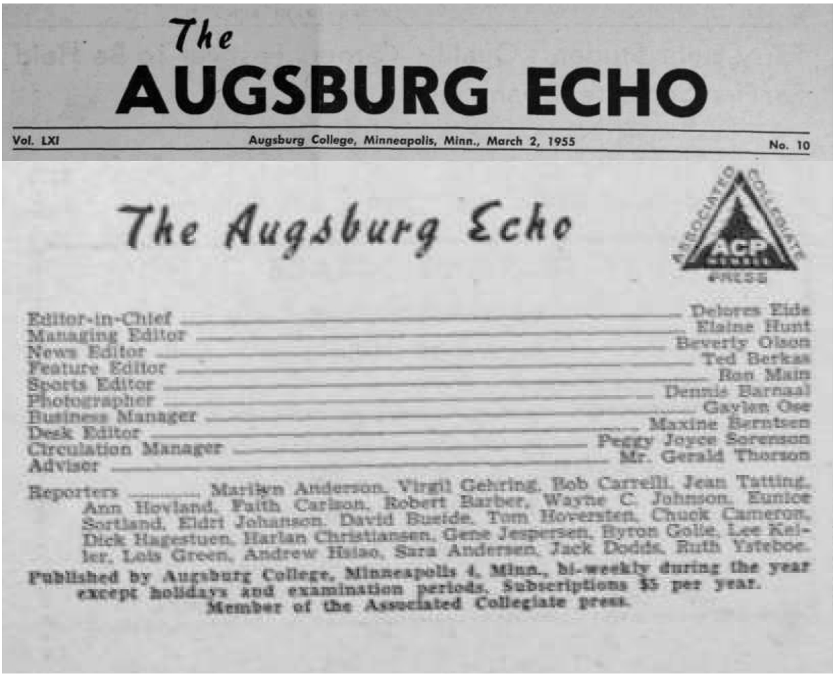
I thought you small and brown,
But when you spoke
And opened up the windows of your mind,
I glimpsed inside a house of splendid rooms.
Now I have walked its paths, have stayed to dine,
Have rested on its spacious, pillowed bed,
I know what heav'n is like, and have no fear
To lodge with Christ,
His friend I've visited.

After she retired she moved to Philadelphia and later on to California to stay with her sister. However we kept in touch. I could ask her about anything. I asked her about being a single woman and how she managed that. I remember asking her how she felt about the prospect of dying. She told me that she was reading a lot of Emily Dickinson, and said, "I have been thinking her thoughts about death."

At Augsburg for the first time in my life, I had a fairly large group of friends with whom I shared common concerns, ideas and dreams. Especially in our sophomore year we talked hours on end.

Sometimes we would have coffee in the cafeteria after lunch, start talking and remain there until supper. Later in the evening we would move to Ma Shore's Homestead Café nearby, eat fresh cinnamon rolls, drink endless cups of coffee and continue to talk. Much of what we were grappling with was the philosophy of Kierkegaard, who demanded of us that we lead a life devoted not only to the aesthetic or even the ethical but a life of faith.

Many of my friends I mentioned above were also associated with the staff of 'The Augsburg Echo', the school paper. Delores Eide was the editor, and later Beverly Olson and I became co-editors.



The

AUGSBURG ECHO

Vol. LXI　Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minn., March 2, 1955　No. 10

The Augsburg Echo

ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS
ACP

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Published by Augsburg College, Minneapolis 4, Minn., bi-weekly during the year except holidays and examination periods. Subscriptions $5 per year.
Member of the Associated Collegiate press.

The Augsburg Echo, March 2nd 1955 (Source: www.augsburg.edu)

Though I had many friends at Augsburg, there was one who has remained close all my life: Shelby Gimse (Andress). Shelby is two years older than I am. She was never part of our gang and neither one of us can remember how we met. Perhaps it was through the Student Council. Shelby was the first woman president of the student body. She was well-known and highly respected by everybody on the campus.

Over the years I wrote a number of poems for her. One of the first I wrote was a sonnet for her wedding to Jim Andress. It was set to music by Leland Sateren who was the director of the Augsburg choir and a well-known composer. It was sung at her wedding and I was her bridesmaid. The song is titled 'In His Care'.

The love you give to one another now
Is wordless, knowing words can never tell
Reality so deep as love as well
As can a tender touch upon the brow
To teach a wand'ring ringlet how to go,
A pressure on the hand can soon dispel
A trace of fear, in meeting eyes can tell
Of understanding deep enough to know
Thoughts yet unthought. And so throughout the years,
You too will grow, together into one

Still closer knit. The secrets that you share,

The common tasks and, on occasion, tears

Will bind you to each other, and to Him

Who loves you both and keeps you in His care.

One of the things Shelby did for me was to bequeath me permission to visit Tante Hilde. Tante Hilde, who had never married, had a house just across from the college, She had given Shelby special permission to come and see her when Shelby found herself stressed out because of her very public life in the college. When Shelby left Augsburg she arranged for me to be able to go there. I still remember how Tante Hilde would say "I don't have a thing in the house," and then would bring out cakes, pastries and other wonderful things she had made. It was a real haven.

Shelby went on to have a distinguished career in the Search Institute in Minneapolis, as a specialist in corporate dynamics and change. Though we have rarely been in touch more than once or twice a year, somehow we have been able to share the experience of critical times in our lives.

A creative period

The four years at Augsburg were, in terms of my poetry, one of the most creative periods of my life. There was a poem in the style of Walt Whitman that catches something of the intensity I was feeling.

I WANT TO SING

I want to sing'
Poets before me have sung and I revel
In chanting their music,
But there are songs still within me
That no one has sung,
And my lungs and my chest expand
As I breathe
In the odors of life and of death
And I want to express it.
Not just my own, but the songs
In the hearts of my neighbours,
The wild joy of running together
In wind by the seashore.
The quiet of walking
At midnight alone in the moonlight,
The dust and the sweat and the din
Of the day and the city.
I would sing of death, the ending
Feared and wished for,

And of the daily, more torturous
Dying we call existence.
Oh, God, for the passion, the
Words and the music!
I want to sing!

Some of the poems were about the tensions of friendship.

HANDS OF FLESH

Hands of flesh
    Reach out
    Grope
Ache to twine
Submerge themselves,
Possess
And be possessed.
But reaching
Love lets fingertips
Touch
And then restrains.
Leaving spirits
To be free
Alone.

BETWEEN TWO FRIENDS

Between two friends a misty curtain hangs,
At times so gauzy that the breath of love
Can lift it for an instant, easing pangs
Of lonely, friendless hours; but moments of
Such understanding pass; the mist descends
And by the chilling winds of fear and pride
Is changed to ice, a rampart that defends
The self and locks it in. Alone inside
Himself each needs to give and to receive
Again; the wall between them melts but there
Hangs still the misty veil that will not leave,
For each fears that the light his soul will bare.

The temple’s veil was ripped by Jesus’ love.
Perhaps friends joined in Him can veils remove.

There are couple of poems about the dryness of the spirit.

LENT

Spring

And I am a dead leaf, cracked and brown.

My juice is dried up.

Blown by each wind

Till I find

The safety of a gutter

Where rain turns me to mulch.

I am cut off.

Regraft me, God.

There are two poems about the construction of the self. The 'jumble of mirror-bits' refers to Charles Cooley's theory of the looking-glass self. The poem is about constructing the self from the disparate experiences of our life.

SUM?

Language has no problem - I am I,

To neighbors: you,

Though time and style

May change my face.

But in naked thought,

When self seeks self

It finds none:

A jumble of mirror-bits

That do not fit.

Threads of desire

That reach out

To knot with others

Holding in,

Star fragments

With competing suns.

The second poem uses the imagery of building a house. As a child I loved the process of our family building a house, and in later years I twice had the opportunity of supervising the building of a house for myself in Maharashtra.

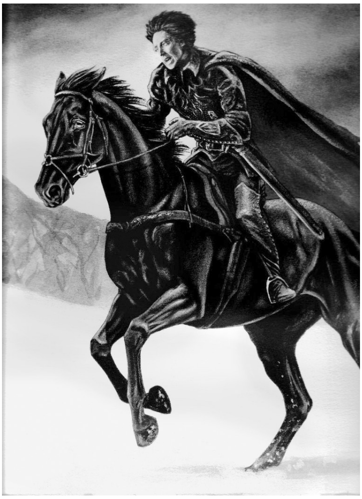
I AM A PLANLESS HOUSE

I am a planless house, built by each hand
That passes, careless, well-intentioned men
Or selfish. Leaderless, the motley band
Quarrel, work for a day, then leave again.
A hundred ways my roofs pitch in the air,
And narrow, unlit halls lead only to
Rooms windowless and dank; the central stair
Stops suddenly in space, no goal in view.
No plumbline ever trued my slanting walls;
Foundation stones are crumbling as dry sod,
But solid beams of oak support these halls –
Beams fit to house a king, perhaps a God.

O Carpenter of Nazareth, make me
A temple with my holy place in thee.

Learning Spanish

I decided rather late that I wanted to learn Spanish, so I didn't have enough time to take both first and second year. There was an older student on the campus named Franklin Rykken, who was reputed to be able to pick up a new language over a weekend. I decided to try Rykken's strategy. My friends recall that I locked myself in a room from Friday to Monday and learnt enough so that I could enrol immediately in the second year. This, of course was the absolute antithesis of the 'natural approach' advocated by many language experts. My listening and speaking skills were rather shaky but I had learnt enough to further develop my skills in reading and translation. I loved the language, particularly some of the poetry. Our Spanish teacher, Mrs. Mimi Kingsley was Mexican. She was the aunt of Joan Baez, one of the great singers of the 1960's. The best translation I did was of Federico Garcia-Lorca's 'Song of the Rider'.



Song of the Rider (Source: www.romanianstudies.org)

SONG OF THE RIDER

Cordova
Faroff and lonely
Darkskinned pony, moon greatbodied
Olives in the bag beneath me
Though well I know the way to travel
Never will I get to Cordova.

O’er the plain and through the night-wind
Darkskinned pony, moon ensanguined
Death I feel watching and waiting
Out of the towers of Cordova.

Ay, but the road is so endless,
Ay, my pony courageous
Ay, for death waits my coming
Before I arrive at Cordova

Cordova
Faroff and lonely.

CANCION DEL JINETE

Córdoba.
Lejana y sola.
Jaca negra, luna grande,
Y aceitunas en mi alforja.
Aunque sepa los caminos,
Yo nunca llegaré a Córdoba.

Por el llano, por el viento,
Jaca negra, luna roja.
La muerte me está mirando
Desde las torres de Córdoba.

¡Ay que camino tan largo!
¡Ay mi jaca valerosa!
¡Ay que la muerte me espera,
antes de llegar a Córdoba!

Córdoba.
Lejana y sola.

I also translated a story by Miguel de Unamuno. It was titled 'San Manuel Bueno Martyr'. It was about a Spanish priest who had lost his faith but kept it a secret because he did not want to leave his parishioners bereft.

Grammar

Although I had always loved language - in the sense of meaning and sound- in the final year at Augsburg I found I was also thrilled by grammar. We had a course in Modern English, which I thought utterly boring-probably because I had never got around to reading the textbook. However, the night before the exam I started to read the book and couldn't put it down. In a very simple and elegant way, the authors described the syntax of English and opened up a different way of looking at language. This was a description of English grammar from a pre-Chomskyan structural point of view, and I realise now that it was the beginning of my realisation that I was interested in linguistics.

The dream deferred

When I came to Augsburg, I had a definite idea that I wanted to go to India sometime. Although I wrote one research paper on 'Aid to Developing Countries' and studied a little about Indian religion, for the most part the dream of going to India was on the back burner. When I left Augsburg my immediate priority was to get a job. Since I had a minor in teacher education I had the requisite qualifications to become an English teacher in a public school. I applied for a job at the High School in Grayslake, a small town 40 miles north of Chicago. I was appointed, and joined the school in September 1957.

Maxine Berntsen in her office at Luther College
(Source: Personal collection)

Grayslake, Columbia and Luther (1957-1961)

5¢ TO 1.00 & UP
EAT
BANK
LENNOX

Grayslake area, Main Street (Source: Tribune Archive Photo / Chicago Tribune)

Grayslake

I cannot recall how it happened that I got a job at Grayslake but it was a good place to be for a year. It was a small town (officially a village) about the same size as Escanaba. It was in the northernmost part of Illinois, just outside the elite suburban area north of Chicago. Somehow the class distinctions in the town seemed sharper than those I had experienced growing up in Escanaba. However, it may be that in Grayslake I was in a position to view the town from a different social perspective. I quickly became aware that there was a section of the population whose families had been the old settlers in the area. They were largely of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant backgrounds. The other section was made up of families of more recent immigrants, many of whom were Roman Catholic.

In the school I taught several English classes on the Senior High School level. I also taught Spanish, and was the faculty adviser for the student newspaper. Until that time I had had no teaching experience except for my brief stint as a practice teacher when I was a student at Augsburg.

The job was very demanding. The policy of the school was to have students write an essay once a week. These essays had to be corrected and given back to the students for rewriting. Then the rewritten essays had to be corrected again. It is no exaggeration to say that I have never worked so hard in my life.

The students were grouped into sections according to their ability. The class I remember most vividly was a low ability group of eleventh graders. It was scheduled for the last hour of the day. They were all boys. I was a new teacher, and only 22 years old – about five years older than my students. Some of the boys were bigger than me.

The challenge was to keep order, and I worked out a strategy. Throughout the period I strolled up and down the aisles. I addressed the students by their last names, and generally managed to create a sort of military discipline in the class. I remember when I managed to win some respect from Ronny, the most troublesome boy in the class. It was a Sunday afternoon. I met him just as I was returning from a twenty mile bicycle ride I had taken in the countryside. We happened to meet and he asked where I had gone. When I told him I had biked twenty miles, he was impressed. He was less a problem after that.

The faculty of Grayslake were a congenial group. Margaret Calhoun (Sikes) came to mean the most to me and still remains-a close friend. She was nearly twenty years older than me. She taught English and art. During the Depression she had worked on a Government sponsored project to beautify public buildings. She had also taught in Upper Michigan in the Finnish-dominated small towns north of Escanaba. Her politics was strongly left leaning, and it was the first time in my life that I had a leftist friend.

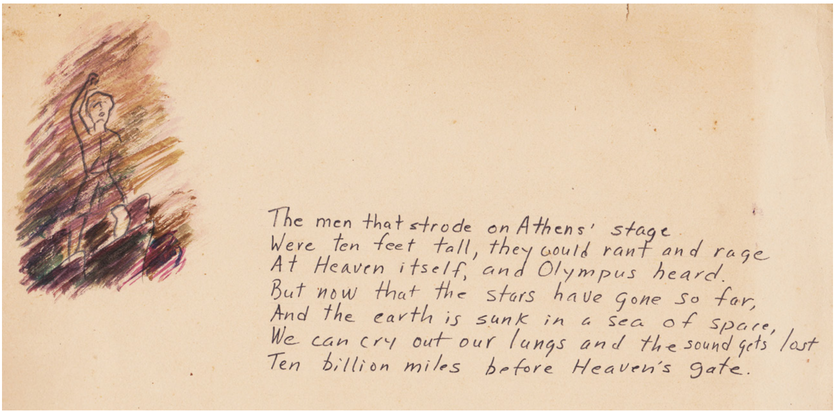
She lived in Round Lake, a village some miles outside of Grayslake, and on weekends I often would ride my bike out to see her. We have continued to keep in touch, though only about once a year. The last time I talked to her she was 97 and was planning to reach 100.

It may have been with Margaret that I went to see a performance of "J.B." a play by Archibald Macleish. The play is a modern re-telling of the Biblical story of Job, and deals with some of the philosophical dilemmas of modern life. This play prompted me to write a poem.

THE MEN THAT STRODE ON ATHENS' STAGE

The men that strode on Athens' stage were ten feet tall,
They could rant and rage and batter the door
Of heaven itself
And Olympus heard.

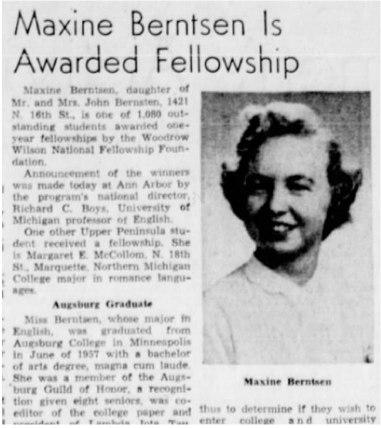
But now that the stars have gone so far
And the earth is sunk in a sea of space,
We can cry out our lungs but the sound gets lost
Ten billion miles before heaven's gate.



The men that strode on Athens' stage
Were ten feet tall, they could rant and rage
At Heaven itself, and Olympus heard.
But now that the stars have gone so far,
And the earth is sunk in a sea of space,
We can cry out our lungs and the sound gets lost
Ten billion miles before Heaven's gate.

The Men That Strode on Athens' Stage (Source: Personal collection)

While at Grayslake, I realized I wanted to do an M.A in English. Since Jerry Thorson had done his postgraduate work in English at Columbia University. I decided that that was where I wanted to go. I applied for a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship and received it. That meant that the major part of my expenses would be provided for.



Maxine Berntsen Is Awarded Fellowship

Maxine Berntsen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Bernsten, 1421 N. 16th St., is one of 1,080 outstanding students awarded one-year fellowships by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.

Announcement of the winners was made today at Ann Arbor by the program's national director, Richard C. Boys, University of Michigan professor of English.

One other Upper Peninsula student received a fellowship. She is Margaret E. McCollom, N. 18th St., Marquette, Northern Michigan College major in romance languages.

Augsburg Graduate

Miss Berntsen, whose major in English, was graduated from Augsburg College in Minneapolis in June of 1957 with a bachelor of arts degree, magna cum laude. She was a member of the Augsburg Guild of Honor, a recognition given eight seniors, was co-editor of the college paper and

Maxine Berntsen

thus to determine if they wish to enter college and university

The Escanaba Daily Press, April 3rd 1958
(Source: www.newspapers.com)

I went home to Escanaba briefly at the end of the summer. On my way to New York I stopped again at Grayslake to say goodbye to my friends. I was in a somewhat fragile state. This was the first time, I was leaving the Midwest. In some ways the atmosphere at Grayslake made me acutely conscious of my working class origin and growing up on the 'wrong side of the tracks'. I knew my academic record was good, and I had just won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. But I also knew I was going to be surrounded by many students equally or better qualified than myself.

Columbia

I suppose then the whole year at Columbia was the most difficult of my life. From the very first moments I was in a state of culture shock, and never felt completely comfortable until the day a year later when I boarded the train to return to the Midwest. Though I had spent four years in Minneapolis I had never experienced an environment like Manhattan. The sight of skyscrapers with an unbelievable number of floors simply threw me. There were very few trees to be seen and in the two parks - Central Park and Morningside Park - there were trees but we were warned to be very careful about going there. When my taxi arrived at Johnson Hall, the residence hall where I was to stay, I paid the driver the amount indicated on the meter. "Where's my tip?" he asked. I told him I was a student and couldn't afford a tip. "Then yah shouldn't be taking a taxi," he retorted.

Columbia University
(Source: www.columbia.edu)

Gradually I got to know the women in the dorm and made some friends. However, I never stopped feeling that life in university was unnatural, as we were surrounded only by our peers. We didn't get to know any families, and we had no connection with either old people or young children.

The policy of the English department for students at the M.A. level was basically to tell you to read English literature for a year and then come back and take the exam and write your thesis. The only compulsory course was the seminar which was led by my thesis adviser, Dr. John Unterecker. I had chosen contemporary literature as my field of study.

The academic atmosphere at Columbia was extremely different from what I had known at Augsburg. As I have already described, Augsburg was at one and the same time a vibrant intellectual space and a caring community in a context of a shared spiritual commitment. Much of what I saw at Columbia seemed non-serious and dilettantish. There was little sense that the work they were doing or the subjects they were teaching had any ultimate significance. At one point, towards the end of my year I started a satirical poem in the manner of Byron's 'Don Juan'. I never got very far but it may give an idea of what I felt.

DON JUAN AT COLUMBIA

To save someone the job of exegesis
I'll tell you now just where I got my style;
Of course, there's one less subject for a thesis,
But surely there are better by a mile.
It may seem that no theme connects these pieces,

But there's a subject buried in this pile;
My aim is a Columbia Don Juan,
A project that will take a bit of doin'.
....

I showed the poem to John Unterecker and he asked ruefully, "Are we really that bad?" Of course, the poem is an exaggeration. Unterecker himself was a kind man and a helpful thesis adviser. Some of his major work was on W. B. Yeats and it may be partly because of him that I began to love the work of Yeats.

In terms of intellectual inspiration, however. the most memorable Professor I had was Marjorie Hope Nicolson, the Head of the English Department. She was teaching Seventeenth Century English poetry. I only attended a couple of her lectures but they were memorable, as was the force of her personality.

Marjorie Hope Nicolson
(Source: www.columbia.edu)

One of her main interests was in, what was called, 'The Great Chain of Being'. This was the medieval concept that all forms of life in the cosmos are related to each other. Her thesis was that with the Enlightenment, this unitary vision broke down, resulting in a soulless experience of life in materialism and untrammelled individualism. On the one hand, she could handle these weighty themes. On the other hand she never let her philosophical conceptions weigh too heavily on some of the delicate metaphysical poems she was teaching. I remember when she was presenting one such poem - perhaps by Herbert - she read the poem aloud and simply said, "A gem, ladies and gentlemen, a gem."

In my classes and in the dorm I started making friends, including some international students. One was Hoda Hebaisha, a journalist from Cairo. The two I got to know the best were from India. One was A. K. Sita who was associated with the I.C.S.S.R. in New Delhi. The other one was Leela Gurugunta Sehgal, who was teaching at Lady Shri Ram College in New Delhi. Leela was originally from Gurugunta, a small princely state near Raichur in Northern Karnataka. She had spent much of her childhood living in the palace of her aunt, the Rani of Gurugunta. She described how in the old days she and her siblings were waited on hand and foot.

When Sardar Vallabhhai Patel overnight dissolved all the princely states, the status of Leela's family changed drastically. They left Raichur and moved to Hyderabad. Later when Leela finished a degree in political science she joined the faculty of Vivek Vardhini College in Hyderabad. She told me that if I wanted to go teach English in India she could get me a job at Vivek Vardhini.

Once I started working on my thesis my life had a clearer structure. I had chosen to work on ‘Little Gidding,’ the last section of T.S.Eliot’s “Four Quartets.” In the process of working on Eliot I became quiet irritated by his socio-political views. His essay ‘The Idea of a Christian Society’ was downright reactionary. But there are parts of the “Four Quartets” that I still love, and these days as I have been looking back over my life I am moved again by the lines:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And to know the place for the first time.

At the end of the term I passed my exam and in the following summer completed the thesis.

Looking back I regret I did not take many of the opportunities that were available in New York. The maiden run of ‘My Fair Lady’ was going on at the time but I did not go to see it. I never learnt to negotiate the excellent public transportation system in New York; so I missed out on many cultural activities.

One thing I did do was attend an Afro-American church service in Harlem. I will never forget the singing. The sermon, much like an Indian *kirtan,* was punctuated with bursts of song from the congregation. Not once but several times there were processional offerings, with people singing and dancing as they moved up to the altar. One of the songs they sang I had never heard before. It was:

I JUST COME FROM THE FOUNTAIN

I just come from the fountain, Lord,
I come from the fountain,
I just come from the fountain, Lord,
His name so sweet.

The other musical gift from New York was an introduction to American folk songs sung by Richard Dyer-Bennett, the renowned tenor. During the summer, two of my friends and I rented an apartment. It was sparsely furnished but it had a record player and a collection of folk music. Some of the songs sung by Dyer-Bennett have stayed with me for the rest of my life. I especially remember his exquisite rendering of the 'Streets of Laredo' and 'The Colorado Trail'.

As she had promised, Leela wrote to Dr. S.D Satwalekar, the Principal of Vivek Vardhini College saying that I would like to come there and teach English. He wrote back promptly and said they would be happy to have me. However, I still had to pay back some debts and I needed money to buy a ticket. I heard that Luther College in Iowa was looking for instructors, and representatives from the college would be conducting interviews in Long Island. I sat for the interview and was selected.

Friends from New York could not understand how I wanted to ‘bury myself in Iowa’, but I knew better. I got on the train; it was one of those single compartments that somebody has described as ‘a womb with a view’. I slept happily and securely as I returned to the Midwest.

Luther

The environs of Luther could not be more different than those of Columbia. Luther is situated in Decorah, a small town in the Northwest corner of the Iowa where Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota meet. It is a rural area of gentle hills and bluffs, not far from the Mississippi. The two years at Luther were a good time, though the college was very different from Augsburg.

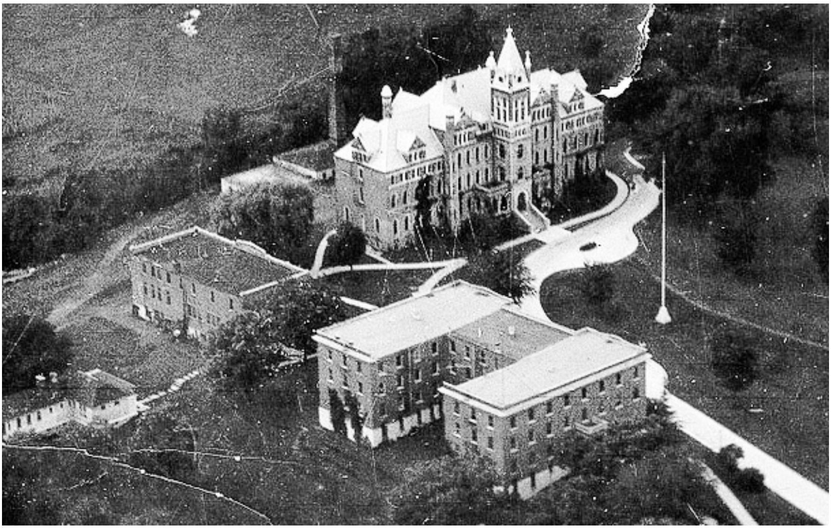
Luther specialized in the classics and there was generally a restrained atmosphere. At Augsburg, you could openly argue, even write editorials in the college paper criticising the administration. Even on highly sensitive issues we could speak our minds, and still be assured that we would not be ostracised from the community. In Luther, everything was kept ‘under wraps’. I remember saying to Clara Paulson, a single woman in the English department, that if there was some controversy we should talk about it. Miss Paulson said, “You are probably good for us.”

Thinking about my years at Luther I can see that communication was a major theme of my poems. Here is the poem I wrote to Miss Paulson:

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the touching
Of two spirits in the air;
Ballerinas there suspended
For an instant, they can share
Their delight in sheer earth freedom,
And, on landing, each one knows
That they held the same perspective
As earth spun beneath their toes.

We had a group of young faculty members at Luther, and did some crazy things. We would have picnics, sometimes just eating peanut butter sandwiches and apples on the top of a hill. Then we would roll down to the bottom, like little kids.



Luther College (Source: Luther College Archives at Flickr)

I was teaching English literature and had great freedom in planning my course. I remember preparing intensely for a class I gave on the Romantic poets, and the historical and philosophical issues they had faced.

My closest friend was Eleonore (Ellie) Hansen. She taught English and was also an excellent oboeist. She had been born in Germany where her father was the head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin. He was an authority on silicon chemistry. After WW II the family moved to Toledo, Ohio, which was the major centre of glass manufacturing in the country. Ellie's father kept losing his students to the glass factories, where the pay was higher. At the age of eighty he struggled to finish his definitive work on silicon chemistry.

Once Ellie came to Escanaba and stayed in our house for a couple of days. For some reason we went to see Mrs. Dimmock who lived down the block. As a child, I had always been scared of Mrs. Dimmock. Now as we talked, she told Ellie and me about her life as an immigrant from Sweden, and her frustration at not being able to get an education. A few days later, thinking of the similarities between the experience of Mrs. Dimmock and Ellie's father, I wrote this poem.

INCREDIBLE OLD WOMAN

Incredible old woman,
She'd stand there by the door
And scare us with her tongue, her cats,
And all those hundred plants
That wound in every corner of her house.
And now we sat inside and heard amazed
How grief had come to all her dreams,
How once she'd hoped to look inside a leaf,
Or trace the path of stars across the sky,
But barred by poverty and foreignness,
She'd washed her dreams down boarding-houses'
drains.

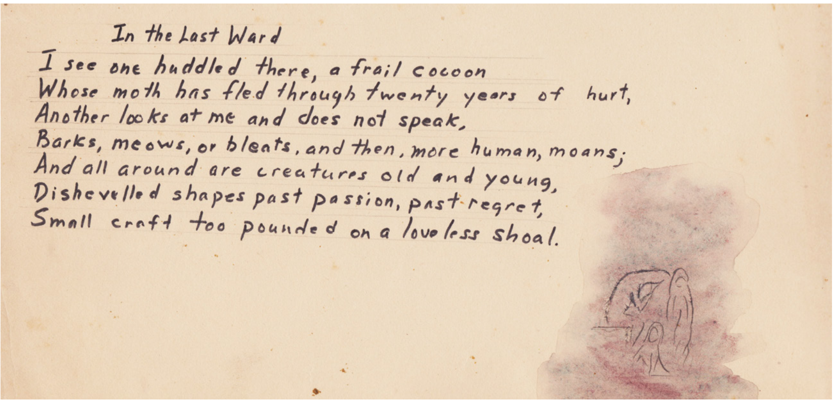
Some nights she saw the stars,
And afternoons she'd tend her plants,
But all the rest was drudging
With a man who never dreamed
('The old man's gone' she said the day he died.)
But still she worked and chopped and stacked her wood,
Or sat and raised that matriarchal head
To say she'd face slow death because she must.

And as we sat in silence I recalled
Your father, scientist yet child,
Still awed by nature's geometric lines.
He too had dreamed - to build an institute,
But dreams cannot compete with factories.
So now he labors eighteen hours a day
To salvage what he can and make a book.

In the course of one of our conversations Ellie told me about the experience of her sister who was interning as a nurse. Her last assignment was in a mental hospital where she had to go into the last ward, in which the most severely ill patients were kept. I found her account very moving and later wrote this poem:

I SEE ONE HUDDLED THERE

I see one huddled there, a frail cocoon
Whose moth has fled through twenty years of hurt,
Another looks at me and does not see,
Barks, meows or bleats, and then, more human moans.
And all around are creatures old and young,
Dishevelled shapes, past passion, past regret,
Small craft too pounded on a loveless shoal.



In the Last Ward
I see one huddled there, a frail cocoon
Whose moth has fled through twenty years of hurt,
Another looks at me and does not speak,
Barks, meows, or bleats, and then, more human, moans;
And all around are creatures old and young,
Dishevelled shapes past passion, past regret,
Small craft too pounded on a loveless shoal.

In the Last Ward (Source: Personal collection)

Ellie's husband died very early. Ellie got a degree in library science, and became a music librarian in the University of Peoria, Illinois. Until a few years ago she continued playing the oboe in the Peoria Symphony Orchestra.

Leaving for Hyderabad

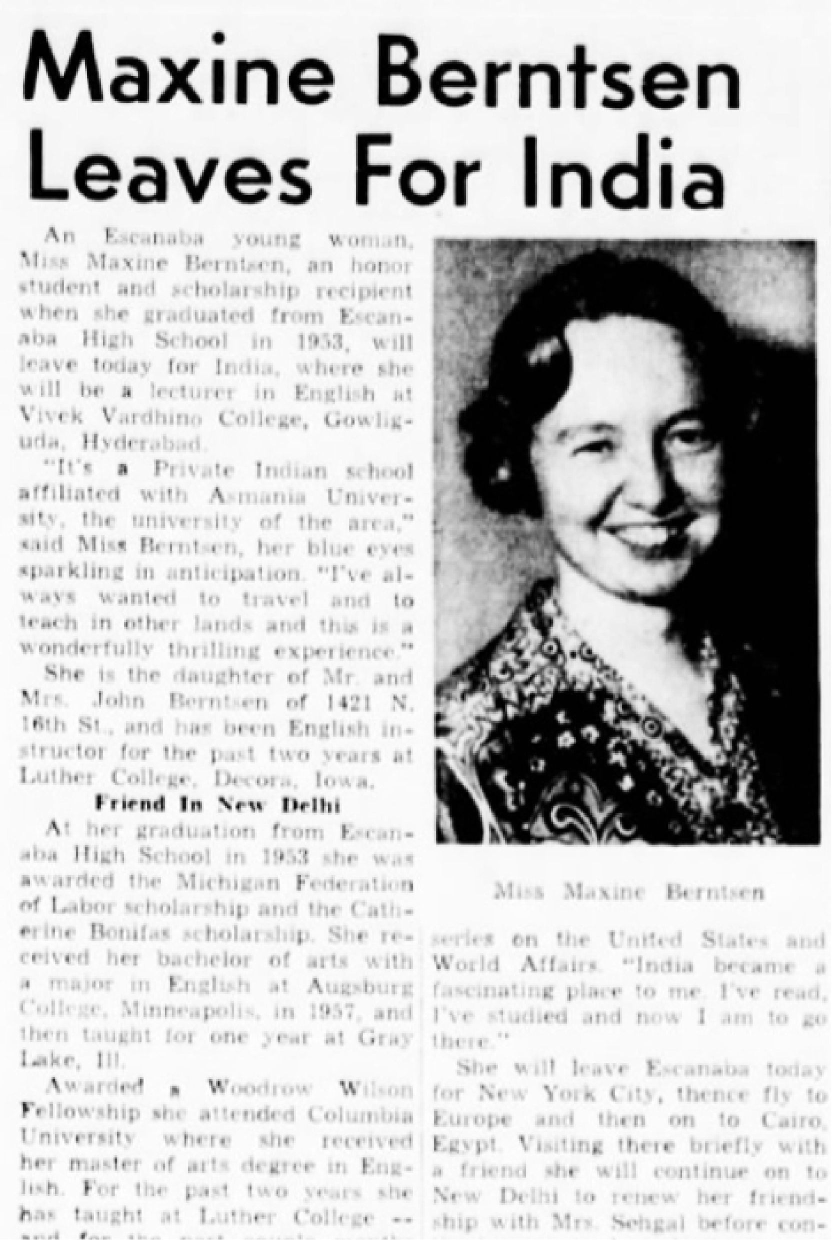
My two years at Luther came to a close. Dr. Satwalekar had asked me to come to Hyderabad by June 12, 1961. Meanwhile an American woman I knew in New Delhi sent me a dire warning, “You have to make up your own mind, but I don’t think you should come. The poverty is terrible. The smells are so bad that it will be a week till you can keep your food down.” I was not going to change my mind about going to Hyderabad, but I steeled myself in order to be prepared for the worst.

I went home to say goodbye to my family. Daddy said, “You’ll do what I did - leave home and never come back.” Mama reassured him, “She’ll be back in two years.”

I was going on a plane for the first time in my life. I flew to Detroit and across Lake Michigan to stop in Toledo to see Ellie. After a brief stop in Cairo to meet Hoda, and in New Delhi to meet Leela, I flew to Hyderabad.

Aerial View of Lake Michigan (Source: UpNorth Memories at Flickr)

Hyderabad (1963-1966)



Maxine Berntsen Leaves For India

An Escanaba young woman, Miss Maxine Berntsen, an honor student and scholarship recipient when she graduated from Escanaba High School in 1953, will leave today for India, where she will be a lecturer in English at Vivek Vardhino College, Gowliguda, Hyderabad.

"It's a Private Indian school affiliated with Asmania University, the university of the area," said Miss Berntsen, her blue eyes sparkling in anticipation. "I've always wanted to travel and to teach in other lands and this is a wonderfully thrilling experience."

She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Berntsen of 1421 N. 16th St., and has been English instructor for the past two years at Luther College, Decora, Iowa.

Friend In New Delhi

At her graduation from Escanaba High School in 1953 she was awarded the Michigan Federation of Labor scholarship and the Catherine Bonifas scholarship. She received her bachelor of arts with a major in English at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, in 1957, and then taught for one year at Gray Lake, Ill.

Awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship she attended Columbia University where she received her master of arts degree in English. For the past two years she has taught at Luther College --

Miss Maxine Berntsen

series on the United States and World Affairs. "India became a fascinating place to me. I've read, I've studied and now I am to go there."

She will leave Escanaba today for New York City, thence fly to Europe and then on to Cairo, Egypt. Visiting there briefly with a friend she will continue on to New Delhi to renew her friendship with Mrs. Sehgal before con-

The Escanaba Daily Press, June 3rd 1961 (Source: www.newspapers.com)

When I arrived at Begumpet Airport, Dr. S.D. Satwalekar and his wife, Dr. Shantabai were there to meet me. Dr. Satwalekar, whom I soon learnt to call *Bhau*, was the founder and Principal of Vivek Vardhhini College. His wife Dr. Shantabai, whom I called *Aee*, was one of the best known obstetricians and gynaecologists in the city. Her nursing home was the first private nursing home in Hyderabad.

As we stood talking a Muslim man came up to *Aee*, and she spoke to him in Urdu, then she spoke to the driver in Telugu, and turning to *Bhau* she spoke in Marathi. Then she turned to me and said, "We'll teach you three languages."

My friend's warning had prepared me for dealing with terrible sights. But nothing had prepared me for the beauty I saw when we drove out of the airport. The road was lined with gulmohars, a tropical tree with brilliant, red-orange blossoms.

Gulmohars in Hyderabad
(Source: Flávio Cruvinel Brandão)

Dr. Shantabai's Maternity and General Hospital was in Abids, the most upscale shopping area of the city. The hospital was just across from the famous Taj Mahal Hotel, and very close to King Kothi, the residence of the Nizam of Hyderabad.

A short article I wrote on *Bhau* years later gives a sense of my first experience with *Aee* and *Bhau*.

Bhau

> Though I worked as a lecturer in Vivek Vardhini College for two years – from 1961 to 1963 – my most vivid memories of Bhau are from living in his home rather than working in the college. I can still see him the day they picked me up at Begumpet Airport – a short, well-built man, already over 70, dressed in a dhoti, long white shirt and brown vest, with a cane in his hand.
>
> There had apparently been a lot of discussion before I came about where the American girl was going to stay. One idea was to have me stay in the apartment in Aee's nursing home. Bhau wasn't sure he wanted to have a long-term female guest in the house, as he usually walked through the house without a shirt after finishing his bath. But they decided to let me stay for a few days at least. One day Bhau did indeed come out of the bathroom shirtless, but I didn't think anything of it. Maybe for that reason they decided to let me stay with them.

What I remember best are the mornings - the vast space of time that stretched between 5:30 when Bhau called me to get up and 10:30 when I left for college. First I sat with Aee and had tea on the veranda of the austere but spacious bungalow, set in old Hyderabadi style in a big compound with high walls completely blocking off the din of nearby Abid Road.

After taking tea I would light the fire in the water heater and then collect flowers for *puja*. Then Bhau and I would sit at the table for breakfast, and during breakfast would start one of our interminable discussions about the state of education, the role of affiliated colleges, the resurrection of the body, and God knows what else ! Breakfast over, Bhau and I would clear the table, stack the dishes very methodically and brush the table cloth.

After the noon and evening meal there were more discussions. Long after everyone else had left the table Bhau and I would sit talking and arguing, waving our still-unwashed right hands.

Bhau had a robust sense of humor, combined with a good deal of common sense. In 1962 after the Chinese invasion everyone in the family – including their sons Ramkrishna and Shrikrishna were knitting sweaters for the *jawans*. Determined to prove that I could make a contribution, I would sit with the knitting needles, grimly trying to make an absolutely plain muffler (which never did get done). Bhau would chide me gently, "Did you come 12,000 miles to learn how to knit?"

At times with Aee he could be playfully romantic. Once after reading in The Reader's Digest that every day a man should tell his wife that he loved her, he went up behind Aee, who was seated on a cane chair. He embraced her, "Darling , I love you." Aee, of course, shrugged him off, "What Western nonsense!"

His humor and good sense made him a diplomat, who commanded respect in whatever circles he moved in – personal, professional, the Maharashtrian community.

As I got to know him better I found out more about Bhau's personal history. When he was a young man his hobby was wrestling, which may be accounted for his fine physique. He had gone to the United States in the 1920's – the time of the Great Depression – to study chemistry. Bhau used to joke about his choosing chemistry despite the fact that his elder brother Sripad Satwalekar was a renowned Sanskrit pandit: "There was a Sanskrit sentence that went on for a full paragraph, so I got scared of studying the language and decided to take chemistry instead."

Some time after his return from the U.S., Aee and Bhau got married, and Bhau began working as a professor in chemistry in the Government College. When the Nizam decreed that all higher education in Hyderabad State be in Urdu medium Bhau was faced with a problem. He did not feel he could teach chemistry in Urdu, and he resigned from his job.

It must have been shortly after this that Bhau and some other associates started the Vivek Vardhini Education Society, a society intended to serve particularly the Maharastrian and Telugu speaking communities in Hyderabad State. But devoting himself to the fledgling society would mean Bhau would not earn anything, and would have to live off the income of his wife, Shantabai, the first woman doctor in the city. Panditji told him to go ahead, that there was no shame in being supported by his wife, as he was devoting himself to the service of the community. So Bhau worked for the rest of his life for one rupee a year. While others looked after the primary school and the high school, Bhau focused on the college. Building a first-class science program was his special dream.

I knew Bhau only in the last decade of his life. When he died in 1970 we went to immerse his ashes in the Godavari. As we stood in the water of that lovely river I felt that for a moment we were mingled with that spirit of gaiety and gentleness-Bhau.

Teaching at Vivek Vardhini

VIVEK VARDHINI
EDUCATION SOCIETY
HIGH SCHOOL

Vivek Vardhini Education Society
(Source: www.vivekvardhini.ac.in)

My classes in the college started at 11 in the morning. I had to take a cycle rickshaw for a couple of kilometres, going through Gowliguda where huge buffaloes with laterally extending horns walked alongside the rickshaw. I was teaching three sections of English for undergraduates in B.A., B.Sc. and B.Com. I was no great success as a teacher. There was a complete mismatch between the students' knowledge of English and the readings in their textbook. Students who could not construct a simple sentence like, 'I went to the *bazaar*' were supposed to read essays by Macaulay or poems such as Housman's 'Loveliest of Trees'. I was trying to teach the students English but naturally their main concern was passing the exam. "Madam, give us notes," they would say.

Sharing with Aee

Sharing with Bhau and Aee (Source: Personcal collection)

While *Bhau* and I talked and argued, with *Aee* there was perhaps sharing on a deeper level. Her mother died within a few days of my arrival, and six months earlier her daughter Meera had married and gone to live in Dar es Salaam. Later, thinking about this quiet sharing, I wrote about her morning and evening ritual.

I WONDERED HOW YOUR HEART HAD KEPT ITS CALM

I wondered how your heart had kept its calm
Until I saw how you began the day
By watching three black birds against the dawn
Or waiting for the muezzin's call to prayer,
And how at night you did not close your eyes
Until you saw one star or traced the moon.

Sometimes at night she would take me to the hospital, where we sat waiting for a woman who was about to deliver. She told many stories – as of the time her mother was taunted by a neighbour who told her that all five of her daughters would never have anything – they would be using clay pots all their lives. Her mother was determined to educate all her daughters, and she did.

Aee described the first time she received her salary – two handfuls of coins. She told me that when she went to conduct a delivery at King Kothi, she first had to offer a pile of coins to the Nizam. She told me too about the time her mother chided her when she heard that Shanta had turned away a patient who could not afford even her modest fees. I refer to this story in the poem below.

TO DR SHANTABAI SATWALEKAR

Ten thousand have been born into your hands
And yet your touch is gentle as the day
You held the first – perhaps more gentle,
For recall, you once considered turning one away
Who could not pay you.
And even yet you sometimes look with awe
At your own fingers wondering at their work
Of freeing children from a pulsing womb,
Astonished that each birth is wholly new.
But you do grow weary, for your hands
So quick to feel, have not missed their own pain.
The ache within your back was printed there
By hours of work and private sorrowing.
Yet still your hands have strength enough to spare
And on your ample back there's room to lean.
Though touched by pain, you are a place of peace,
A Deccan rock .

Watching Aee sew
(Source: Personal collection)

Perhaps because she was a pioneer as a woman practicing medicine in Hyderabad, she was anxious to show that she had all the interests and skills expected of a woman. She enjoyed shopping for saris. She would take me into the inner rooms of shops where we sat on cushions and looked at sari after sari that the shopkeeper spread out for us to see. She was also skilled in cooking and household management. Even heating milk was an elaborate ritual, as there were three or four categories of milk, each of which had to be kept in a different type of container. She was also interested in sewing.

Learning their ways

As the days went on *Aee* was gently shaping me to fit in with their ways. Leela had told me that I need not eat with my hands, but one day when it was just two of us at the table, *Aee* suggested that I try eating with my right hand. She showed me how to break off a chapatti with one hand, and called my attention to the placement of food on the metal plate.

Meals were vegetarian. They were not too spicy and I enjoyed them. But generally when I got up from the table I did not feel satisfied. Sometimes I would quietly walk up the lane to the Prince Store and buy a bar of Cadbury chocolate. One day, however, *Aee* made *besan laddoos* - sweet balls made of roasted chick-pea flour, sugar and ghee. After that there was no need to continue going to the Prince Store.

Cooking with Aee
(Source: Personal collection)

I can't remember when I learned to wear a sari. I think *Aee* wanted me to switch to Indian dress. Finally one of her nieces gave me some help, and I switched over completely.

Ritual pollution

Though *Aee* was not fanatical about ritual pollution there were some rules I had to follow. For instance, once when I was gathering jasmine flowers for *puja* I smelled their fragrance. She ordered me to throw them in the garbage.

It was confusing, though, that sometimes there were new rules in place. One day someone in the family had a baby and all the people had come together to make *dinkache laddo* - a sweet with abundant calcium and good for a lactating mother. All the women had come to do this in ritually pure garments. All their saris were hung up on the line to dry before they started. I ducked my head under one of them and grazed a sari so that it had to be taken off and washed again. I understand that the women were titillating each other with the question, "Would you eat something made by Maxine?"

Language learning

Although I did try to do my best in the college, my real focus was elsewhere. At our initial meeting at the airport *Aee* had said that they would teach me three languages. The language of her family was Marathi, but my first goal was to learn Telugu so that I could speak to the family of my friend Leela. My Telugu tutor was Rev. Stanley Peter, who was at that time the Principal of the Methodist Boys' High School. He was patient, thorough and caring, and he taught me a good deal.

However, the longer I stayed in the Satwalekar house, the more I realized that *Aee* and *Bhau* were treating me like a member of the family, and yet, in the first year I had learnt almost nothing of their language. *Aee* may have also felt this. She often took me with her when she went to visit friends. But once she remarked with irritation, "All you do is smile !" Finally I told *Aee* that I wanted to study Marathi. So she sent me to Pune for the month of May in 1962 where I had a private tuition with Sadashiv Bhave, a Professor of Marathi at Fergusson College.

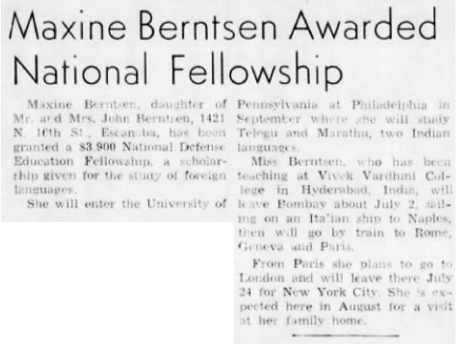
Bhave literally started my tuition by declaring that he was from Satara District in Maharashtra, where men were famous for the way they fought."In Marathi," he told me, "there are all kinds of ways to say 'I'll beat you up', 'I'll bang you', 'I'll throttle you', 'I'll stamp my foot on your Adam's apple'." Years later I wrote a humorous article based on this experience.

The month in Pune was intense. Bhave taught me for a couple of hours each day. Then I studied on my own until I dropped on my cot in exhaustion. When I returned to Hyderabad I continued my tuition. My first teacher was a young woman with a fine appreciation of traditional forms of women's poetry - especially the songs they composed as they worked the grinding stone.

My other teacher was Bhave Master (no relative of Sadashiv). He had been the principal of the Vivek Vardhini School. He dressed like a typical schoolmaster - with a black coat and a Gandhi cap. He looked very severe, but had a fine sense of humour.

Nearing the end of my stay

My two years in Hyderabad were coming to an end. The years had been a precious gift. But I had to get back to the U.S. and get on with my life. I wanted to go to the University of Pennsylvania to study linguistics, Telugu and Marathi, and I had been awarded an NDFL-related Fulbright-Hays fellowship. My idea was that I could work part of the year in an American university and part of the year doing research in India. However, I was afraid that my life at Penn might be as difficult as it had been in Columbia.



Maxine Berntsen Awarded National Fellowship

Maxine Berntsen, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Berntsen, 1421 N. 16th St., Escanaba, has been granted a $3,900 National Defense Education Fellowship, a scholarship given for the study of foreign languages.

She will enter the University of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia in September where she will study Telegu and Marathu, two Indian languages.

Miss Berntsen, who has been teaching at Vivek Vardhini College in Hyderabad, India, will leave Bombay about July 2, sailing on an Italian ship to Naples, then will go by train to Rome, Geneva and Paris.

From Paris she plans to go to London and will leave there July 24 for New York City. She is expected here in August for a visit at her family home.

The Escanaba Daily Press, April 16th 1963
(Source: www.newspapers.com)

A number of the poems I wrote in Hyderabad deal with these themes.

THAT MOMENT WHEN OUR NEEDING MET

That moment when our needing met,
And we breathed peace untouched by fear,
That moment I will not profane
By hourly prayers for its return.
Content that such grace once was given,
I walk in daily love, secure.

I HAVE SUCH REST IN YOU

I have such rest in you I'd be content
To grow inside your love and never go
Outside the space your outstretched hand could reach.
But such love would not honor me or you,
Bound in ourselves we'd starve while all around
The garners of the world held ample food.
I'll go now and come back from time to time
To share with you the sweets of all the world.

Once I was returning to Hyderabad on the train during the monsoon. As we were passing through the Western Ghats I had the feeling that I could stretch out my hands and press the clouds together.

MUST EVERY DISASTER CRAMP OUR REACH?

Must every disaster cramp our reach,
Hold the hurt hand back from the threat of pain?
Will compassion fail in the weary heart
Till we hide in our house from the storm?

How large is the love that can stretch its arms
To enclose each horizon it sees,
That can gather in pain to build tenderer strength,
And out of the storm press peace.

The best poem I wrote for *Aee* was near the end of my stay.

TO MY INDIAN MOTHER

I thought how like those saints of loyalty,
Laxman and Ruth, I also could be true,
Could call a distant land home for love's sake,
Could train my tongue till your speech was my own,
And shape my ways to suit your native place.
But you protested, quoting me those lines
Where Ram tells Laxman men are only logs
Tossed by the current, one moment they may meet
But soon the stream will part them for all time.
I told you then of Ruth, and at her words
'Entreat me not to leave,' I lingered long,
Then hurried on for fear you'd understand.
How could I speak the promise in my heart ?
Ruth's right was marriage, Laxman's blood, and mine?
Mine but my need, and inept, blundering care.
My lovely heroes are too high for me.
Leave Laxman then, and Ruth, let me be
Hanuman. I'll claim his monkey face and tail
Without divinity.

Talk at Maharashtra Mandal

Shortly before I left it was arranged that I would give a talk in Marathi at the Maharashtra Mandal. I ended with a poem by Tukaram, the beloved 17th century poet, along with my translation.

कन्यासासुरासीजाये,मागेपरतोनीपाहे|
तैसेझालेमाझ्याजीवा, केव्हाभेटसीकेशवा||
चुकिलयामाये, बाळहुरुहुरुपाहे|
जीवनावेगळीमासोळी, तैसातुकातळमळी||

As a girl goes to her in-laws
Looking backward at her parents,
So my heart asks at our parting,
“Shall we meet again soon, Keshav?”
As a child strayed from mother
Looks around him, crying, frantic,
As a fish pants out of water,
So I tremble in your absence.

Afterwards *Aee* was upset. She felt that I had devalued my home and family. That was not the case. For one thing, I was not going to be living in Escanaba. Moreover, I had not rejected my family. In a way I had extended it. There was a small verse I had written toward the beginning of my stay. Only recently, in looking at my diary I found it. I think it sums up what I am trying to say.

> If I am yours I am not less
>
> My mother's or my own,
>
> Heaven is a house of many mansions.

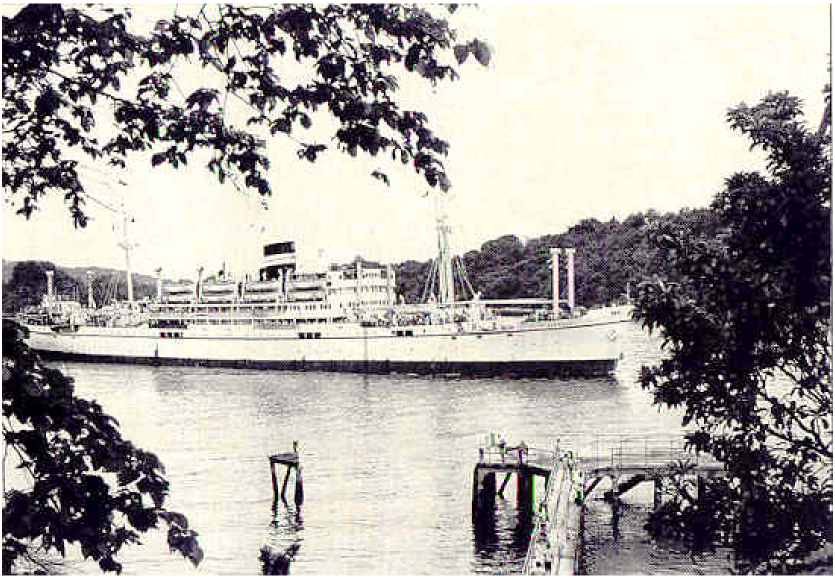
Departure

I had decided that on my way back I would first go to East Africa by boat to meet the Satwalekars' daughter, Dr. Meera and her husband Dr. Noor Vellani, and then fly back to the U.S. via Geneva.

RASHEED & Co
KHALEEL BROTHERS
G.I.D
GLASS ISLAND
RADIO
Hemagraph.
Abids, Hydrabad A. P
to our house

Abid Circle, Hyderabad in 1958
(Source: Personal collection)

Return to U.S. and Time at Penn (1963-1966)



Ship to Mombassa (Source: www.iancoombe.tripod.com)

Return to Escanaba via Dar es Salaam and Geneva

The trip to Dar es Salaam was memorable. We went by ship from Mumbai to Karachi to Mombasa, with a stop at Zanzibar. It is the only time I have ever had an ocean voyage. It was during the monsoon. Most of the passengers were sticking to their rooms, but I was walking the deck, remembering once again that I was a Norwegian seaman's daughter. I still recall the Chief Engineer commenting half to me, half to himself, "I don't like the sound of the way those waves are hitting the hull." We arrived without a mishap, however, stopping briefly at Zanzibar. I remember somebody saying, "Can't you smell the fragrance of spices in the air?" I don't think I could, but the image of the beach lined with palm trees is still etched in my mind.

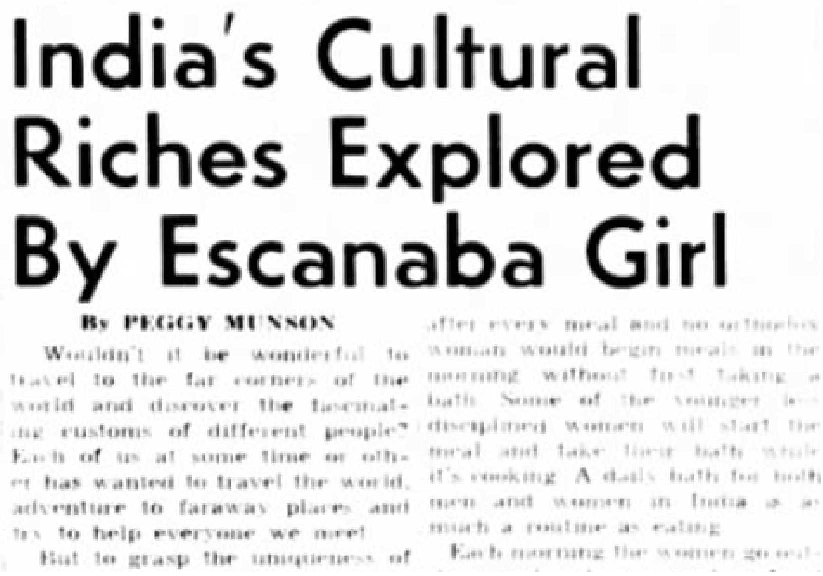
Meera and Noor came to meet me in Mombasa and took me to Dar es Salaam. Noor had arranged a big reception for me, mostly with members of the large Indian community in the city. Though my stay at their home was brief, it was good to be able to share with them my experience of being in Hyderabad with Meera's family.

I also got a chance to learn about their life in Tanganyika. Noor had been born in Dar es Salaam, but now with *Uhuru* (the Swahili word for Independence), he could no longer be sure of whether it would be possible to continue living there. The newly assertive Tanganikan population wanted to put in place an educational system that had little space for elite English medium schools.

I also had an opportunity to go to the university and to see some of the problems the newly independent Tanganikans were facing as they tried to build up higher education in the country. As they did not have enough indigenous faculty they brought many people from abroad to teach at colleges and universities.

I had decided to go back to the U.S. with a brief stopover at Geneva, where I stayed with Dr. D. N. (Anna) Patwardhan and his wife Sonutai, who were close friends of the Satwalekar family.

Finally, I got home to Escanaba. I think my family sensed that I had changed, and they did not know how to take this. My speech was a little different. I remember that an American professor I met in Hyderabad said that my speech sounded like that of an alien. One of my sisters said, “You even sneeze differently.” I went to a shopping mall and asked “Where can I post this letter?”, and the lady said, “You mean you want to mail it?”



India's Cultural Riches Explored By Escanaba Girl

By PEGGY MUNSON

Wouldn't it be wonderful to travel to the far corners of the world and discover the fascinating customs of different people? Each of us at some time or other has wanted to travel the world, adventure to faraway places and try to help everyone we meet.

But to grasp the uniqueness of

The Escanaba Daily Press , September 6th 1963 (Source: www.newspapers.com)

I suppose I must have looked pretty bizarre. I was wearing a sari. Looking back I wonder how I could have been so insensitive as to do that. I suppose I was trying to assert the new element in my identity, and at some level my family must have realized this and been disconcerted by it. Sometimes it may have sounded as if I was saying that the way we did things in Hyderabad were better. It was certainly difficult to communicate that I still appreciated things at home. I remember my mother washing and ironing my sari. I said, "Mama, you have never worn a sari, or ironed one, and yet you manage all these things very well." She said dryly, "I've had a lot of experience with sheets."

On the whole it was difficult to communicate to my mother what I had experienced in India. Over the years however she gradually got interested. She never read much, but if she saw something about India she read it. She was proud of my being in India and doing something. Somehow my being here opened up her world.

University of Pennsylvania (Penn), Philadelphia

University of Pennsylvania (Source: www. newnownext.com)

he years 1963 to 1966 were momentous in a number of ways. Political events of the time included the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the Civil Rights Movement and Lyndon Johnson's

War on Poverty. Academically it was the time of the Cognitive Revolution. Being at Penn meant I was in a position to see many things close at hand although I was not a direct participant.

The fear that I had had on leaving Hyderabad that I would again experience the isolation I had felt at Columbia was clearly unfounded. For one thing I was much more self-confident than I had been at the time in Columbia. In addition, Penn was a much more comfortable place. Recalling my feelings on leaving Hyderabad, I wrote the following poem:

I DREAMED EACH NIGHT OF RENTING ROOMS

I dreamed each night of renting rooms
In lonely tourist inns,
Of climbing dingy stairways
That never had an end.
Leaving you was leaving heav'n
Each day I built the lie.
Seized sun and scent of jasmine, stars
To clothe your memory.
And now at home on human earth,
Residing in myself,
I lean on sun and space assured
That human love's enough.

I also could look critically at my tendency to idealize the persons I loved.

THE GODS WE BUILD OF HUMAN CLAY

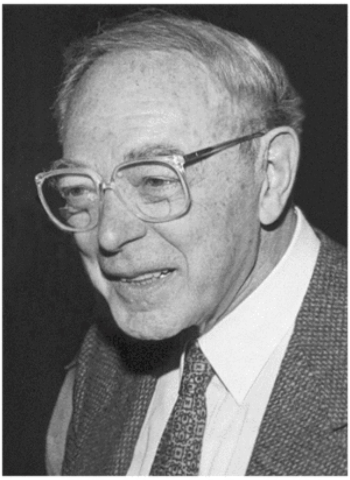
The gods we build of human clay
Are not without divine —
A quickened understanding
Some grace of limb or mind.
But forced to bear the weight of God
Their frail terrestrial frame
Crumbles and their human bits
Are buried in the ruin.

The Cognitive Revolution

By the time I arrived in Philadelphia in 1963, the Cognitive Revolution had been underway for about seven years. I had not read the key texts but the main tenets were everywhere in the air. As long as Behaviourist Psychology with its positivist philosophical underpinning ruled academia, it was impossible to talk about the mind. It was a black box. We could look at what people did or said but we could not look at meaning or ask about people's wishes, desires, intentions or hopes. In the field of linguistics, Noam Chomsky, who had done his Ph.D. at Penn, delivered a devastating blow to the behaviourist view of language acquisition in his review of B.F. Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour*.

Actually Chomsky and his close associates were not as interested in natural languages as in the formal and invariant languages required for research in Artificial Intelligence. But some of Chomsky's claims sparked a good deal of empirical research in children's language acquisition.

When I was at Penn the linguistic department was still headed by Zellig Harris, who had been Chomsky's thesis adviser. Harris was somewhat a distant figure as he divided his time between Philadelphia and Jerusalem. The linguistics department was divided into two groups – the people who were interested in mathematical linguistics and generative grammar on the one hand and the rest of us on the other. The rest of us included those who were studying Indian languages and a few others who were interested in applied linguistics, historical linguistics or sociocultural linguistics. Those in our group had no contact with the mathematical linguistics people. I certainly had



Zellig S. Harris

Zellig Harris
(Source: www.nap.edu)

no interest in this approach to linguistics, and I undoubtedly would not have been able to understand it even if I had tried. My friends and I were interested in real languages as spoken by real people.

Bridging the Schism in linguistics

Although Zellig Harris was identified with the theoretical linguistics he had written a small booklet titled "A Transformational Grammar Of English" which has proved invaluable to me. In fact, I feel that his description of English grammar provides a bridge between theoretical and applied linguistics. In a few pages he presents a clear and elegant analysis of English syntax in terms of a small set of kernel sentences and the unary and binary transformations which can operate on them. This view of English grammar has informed my teaching of English and has been the basis of my analysis of Marathi grammar. I think it is a great loss that this tiny book has been more or less forgotten.

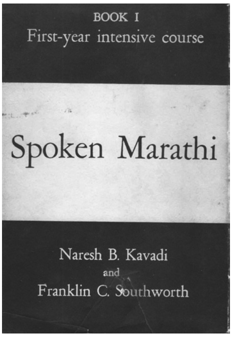
A professor who made a lasting impression on me is Henry Hoenigswald whose field was historical linguistics. He was anxious to utilize the new understanding of linguistics for the purposes of historical reconstruction, particularly of the Indo-European family of languages. He was a fine scholar and a kindly, avuncular man. In one of my lighter moments, I wrote a couple of humorous poems about historical linguistics. One is too technical to quote here but here is the other one. Its theme is a major sound shift in Indo-European. It is to be sung to the tune of 'I am a Poor Wayfaring Stranger'.

I AM A POOR WAYFARING SPIRANT

I am a poor wayfaring spirant
Cut off from other consonants;
The stops are partners, voiced and voiceless,
Supported by their aspirates.
I'm going to find a partner too,
I'm going to find An *f* and *h*;
We're going to fill that spirant line
And in the system take our place.

My programme at Penn

One of the wonderful things at Penn was the freedom we had to chalk out our own programme. I wanted to learn the basics of structural linguistics and historical linguistics. I also wanted to study Telugu and Marathi, as well as some Hindi and a bit of Sanskrit.


BOOK I
First-year intensive course
Spoken Marathi
Naresh B. Kavadi
and
Franklin C. Southworth

Spoken Marathi
(Source: www.amazon.com)

Though Franklin Southworth was officially my Marathi teacher, it was Dr. Naresh Kavadi who really taught me Marathi. Dr. Kavadi had earlier collaborated with Southworth to write "*S*poken Marathi - First year intensive course." Kavadi had come to Penn to work with a group of scholars who were preparing a Marathi-English dictionary.

Kavadi had come with his wife and their two youngest children, Shirish and Shubha. Kavadi and Kusum always spoke to me in Marathi and I was a regular weekend visitor in their home.

Their children used to go to the local school. They would wait at the corner for the bus and when it came they would shout, "*Bas aali bas aali*" (the bus has come). After a few weeks the American children were also saying "*Bas aali bas aali*."

At the Kavadi Home
(Source: Shirish Kavadi)

Kavadi also told family stories.

> A relative was ploughing a field and he found a stone and cast it aside. That night Lord Ganesh came in his dream and said that the stone is a sign of Ganesh and a temple must be built. The relative did not want to because it is a huge commitment. Once you decide to build a shrine you make a commitment for two or three generations, But he finally gave in and did it.

Dr. Naresh Kavadi
(Source: Shirish Kavadi)

With stories like this there was a different level of sharing because we were talking hours on end; it wasn't just in a formal class. And I was learning the culture as well as the language.

I have always felt that I have never sufficiently acknowledged the huge part played by Kavadi and his family in my learning Marathi. It is easy to take the names of well-known people such as Dr. Irawati Karve but Kavadi's gift was immeasurable.

As I said earlier, the years I was in Penn coincided with some of the most momentous years in American history. On December 22nd 1963, only a couple of months after I joined Penn, President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. Like so many people I can remember the exact moment I heard about it. I had gone in to the cafeteria and joined a friend who was having a cup of coffee. "It's too bad about the President," he said. I asked him what had happened and he told me briefly. After that, of course, the T.V. over and over showed the images of Kennedy being shot.

The new President, Lyndon Johnson, appointed Chief Justice Earl Warren to report on the assassination. After reading the report which came out a year later I wrote the following poem:

ON READING THE REPORT OF THE WARREN COMMISSION

Now it is done, the facts are in
After months of meticulous digging
By the highest judicial commission.
We can mark the spot:
The car ran so, from here the shot,
Can devil our brains
With ifs and buts,
But the question of why remains.

Oh, guess we can of the years of hurt
Of the ego beaten on rocks of fact,
But could we still question him hours on end,
We would get little more than that.

The springs of action lie too deep
To be unearthed in any court;
Society's precision tools
Are broken on the human heart.

Shortly after he became U.S. President, Lyndon Johnson declared a War on Poverty. At that time Penn was an island surrounded by a poverty stricken neighbourhood. I lived in Powelton village, a lovely old area that was being gentrified. It was within walking distance of the campus. I wanted to get to know something about the lives of the poor people in the area, almost all of them were Afro-American (at that time it was politically correct to say 'Negro').

There was an Afro-American assistant in the South Asia Library who invited me to his home. As we walked through the area I was appalled at the living conditions. It was worse than third world poverty. Occasionally on an empty lot there would be a sign 'Drug-free Zone', implying that everywhere else drugs were freely available.

When we went upstairs to the apartment where the young man lived I was amazed to see everything well-ordered and spic and span. On the wall there was a big genealogical chart showing that the family had come from the lost tribe of Israel. Whether the story was true or false, heaven knows, but it gave his family an identity and something they could use to fight against the social disintegration that was going on outside.

Cecil B. Moore at a gathering (Source: Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia)

I also visited Cecil B. Moore, the most important black leader in Philadelphia at the time. I wanted to get a sense from him about what was going on. He told me that the upscale supermarkets transferred their outdated goods to stores catering to black people. He described the police brutality that was a part of their daily life. As I was listening to him I started to weep. He said, “I have not seen many tears in this office.” Later, I wrote this poem:

TO A NEGRO NEIGHBOUR IN A NEARBY SLUM

Without love, if I ask you

To have a cup of tea,

To talk about the children,

The landlord and police,

Some little condescension

Will surely catch your eye:

The thought, ‘My cups are china,’

‘Her sleeve’s begun to fray.’

Don’t tighten if you see it,

Accept my tea and me,

Loosed by your understanding,

One day I may be free.

At Penn, a number of concerned people, brought together under the leadership of a Black preacher, decided to stage a non-violent protest in sympathy in refence to the attack on Civil Rights Workers in Selma. Although we were told that this was to be non-violent we were not given any instructions as to how to react when the police came. As we were marching forward, the police came and ordered us to go back. I didn’t know what I was supposed to do, so I just stood there. A policeman pushed me a tiny bit and I fell. There was immediately a cry of "Police brutality ! Police brutality !" But I said, "No, he didn't do anything."

That was my fringe involvement with the civil rights struggle. Around that time, I heard a speaker say that if you want to help in the struggle you have to give up your middle class identity. But I was thinking, I have been trying to get into the middle class all my life.

Not everything in the outside world was so grim. I remember with delight the T.V. coverage of the first American space walk on June 3rd 1965. I chalked on the board in my room the following lines:

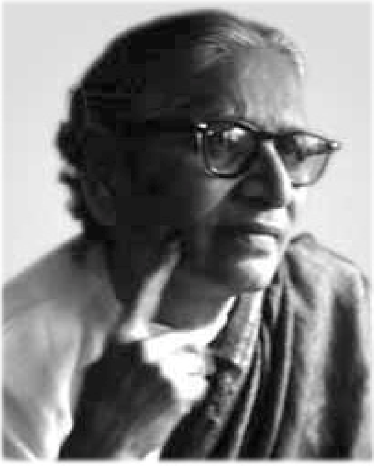
SPACE WALK

Drunk on space in sheer elate,
Cups a hand to scoop a state
Grabs a gulf in tumbling by,
He'll sober up
On gravity.

New friends - Irawati Karve and Eleanor Zelliot

In the summer of 1964 Dr. Irawati Karve, a well-known sociologist and anthropologist, came to Penn to teach a course in Indian anthropology. She also taught the advanced Marathi class, which was me. That was the kind of extravagance the United States could afford.

Together we read *Yugant*, her book on the major characters in the Mahabharata. Irawatibai (Iru) was the mother of Jai Nimbkar who was married to B. V. (Bon) Nimbkar of Phaltan in Maharashtra. Bon's mother Kamalabai Nimbkar (nee Elizabeth Lundy) was an American from Newtown, Pennsylvania, just outside of Philadelphia.

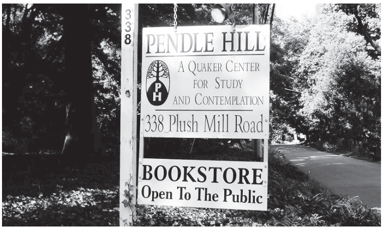


Dr. Irawati Karve
(Source: www.uyirmmai.com)

That summer she had come to visit her father who was living on the New Jersey shore. He was nearing 100 at the time. One Sunday, Iru, Kamalabai, an American friend and I drove to the Jersey shore to see Kamalabai's father. He was a gentle Quaker man who greeted us with a formal kiss on both cheeks and asked, "Has thee had a good trip?"

I will never forget those moments in the car. The vehicle was hardly big enough to contain the force of those two strong women.

Once when we were taking a ride outside of Philadelphia Iru wanted to see Pendle Hill. Pendle Hill was a Quaker study and contemplation center which regularly brought out a series of pamphlets by distinguished people in various fields.



Pendle Hill
(Source: www.uyirmmai.com)

As we looked around we saw a Quakerly looking woman coming up the road. It was Eleanor Zelliot. She and Iru knew each other. Eleanor had just come back from Pune where she was doing a research on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. So it was Iru who introduced me to Eleanor. That was the start of our friendship that has lasted until this day.

Eleanor Zelliot
(Source: Personal collection)

Eleanor is world-renowned for her work on Ambedkar and on the Scheduled Caste Movement in Maharashtra. Years later she and I edited a book titled "The Experience of Hinduism: Essays on Religion in Maharashtra" which was dedicated to the memory of Irawati Karve.

Thinking about my Thesis

Meanwhile I was thinking about my thesis. My original idea was to study the language contact of Telugu and Marathi in border areas. Then I realized that until I could understand variation in one town there was no point in talking about language contact.

The whole idea of variation is completely antithetical to Chomsky's theory. Chomsky argued that if you have any variation at all, you have another language. A language by definition is completely homogeneous. He never made it clear when he was talking about formal language or artificial languages or when he was talking about natural language.

I realized that William Labov who was working at Columbia at that time had a much more realistic view of language variation. He had shown that language variation is correlated with social differences. I felt that is what I wanted to do my research on. I went to meet Labov at Columbia. He agreed to be my thesis adviser, and was extremely supportive.

In addition to Labov I had three other thesis advisers – Franklin Southworth, Dell Hymes and Richard Lambert, professor of sociology.

It was Lambert who suggested that I do my research in Phaltan a small town in Western Maharashtra. Irawati Karve had done a survey of Phaltan, and her data and sample would be available. I wrote to her, and she agreed to help me. She said her daughter, Jai could also find a place for me to live.

Lambert was also helpful in securing financial support from the American Institute of Indian Studies. For years he was my mentor in the development of my career, and I am extremely grateful to him.

Reflection and writing

In addition to thinking about the linguistic issues related to my thesis, I wrote the two poems below. The first is a reflection of my stand on religious belief at that time.

YOU ASKED ME OF MY FAITH

You asked me of my faith,
And all my thoughts were bits and pieces:
A painting seen in Sunday School,
A line from Simone Weil,
Teilhard, Kierkegaard, and God knows who—
A poor pastiche to build a life upon.
Yet on these fragile pieces I have lived,
Yet not on these but on the ground they name,
And if through ignorance or fear I've failed
To name that ground
It holds me just the same.

The other was written after reading Martin Buber's "I and Thou".

MEETING TREES

Meeting trees, like meeting friends
Means a subtle struggle,
One will conquer in the end,
Subjugate the other,
Only in the mystery of grace
The two can be
Subject meeting subject
In triumphant charity.

I was also thinking about communication. This had been a subject that had interested me for a long time. Perhaps the interest was intensified by taking Dell Hymes' class. From time to time I wrote notes on the act of communication. The version below seems to have been written after my return to India, but it basically reflects the view I was developing.

The Communicative Act

And what seems to be said between two people is only a small part of a complex conversation.

Language, we all agree, is a form of communication, but we have paid surprisingly little attention to the analysis of acts of communication. The studies we do have are the work of sociologists, particularly Erving Goffman. But we need similar studies done from a linguistic point of view, for an understanding of what is involved in communicative acts is essential to any theory of language structure and change. The comments below make no pretense of being a theory but they may serve to sketch the outlines of the problem.

Fundamental to communication is the symbolizing power of the human mind, the ability to link form and meaning. This ability, of course, is not limited to linguistic communication. For lovers a melody heard at a first meeting may come to symbolize their relationship. For Proust a cup of tea came to stand for his childhood experiences with his mother. We could multiply endlessly the list of instances where a concrete object becomes the symbol of a thought, a feeling, or an event.

All symbols, linguistic or otherwise, have certain common features which are important for the understanding of language structure and change.

> 1. The symbol is a duality, a linking of form and meaning.
> 2. The linking is often fortuitous or arbitrary.
> 3. To understand or use the symbol each person must refashion the linkage between form and meaning in his own mind.

This linking of form and meaning is felt by many peoples to be a mysterious process, replete with mystical power. Throughout the world we find belief in the power of the name, of mantras and mystic syllables, all testifying to the belief that the utterance of the name of a thing gives power over the thing itself. We get some sense of the primitive experience of the power of symbolism in reading Helen Keller's account of learning her first word: *water*.

As her teacher placed her hand under a water spout and the stream of water fell on one hand, the teacher spelt out the word w-a-t-e-r on Helen's hand. In that moment the mystery of language was revealed to her.

It is, however, in linguistic communication that the linkage of concrete form - that is, sound and meaning is most extensively developed. From the age of one year a child is constantly learning to link experiences and sounds. She may learn that the sound combination *mama* brings the desired response from her mother. Or her accidental repetition of the syllable *nana* on seeing her bottle may lead the whole family into calling the bottle *nana*. She gradually learns that every experience has a name, that is, a sound that can be used to call it back. Though this process of learning the names of things is at its peak between two and seven it continues throughout a person's life.

The activity of making general patterns and applying them to new situations is best seen when children are learning to speak. The child who says, "I sitled," "I dood" and "I seed," has extended to the irregular verbs the regular pattern she has apprehended in "I worked, I played, I walked." A child learning two or more languages at once will occasionally take a pattern she has analyzed from one language and apply in the other. For instance, a child learning Marathi and Telugu at the same time was heard to say *to ekla* 'he climbed.' The grammar of her statement is purely Marathi: *to-* is the Marathi pronoun for 'he', and *la-* is the past tense marker. But instead of the Marathi verbal base *cadh-* 'to climb', she had used the Telugu verb *ek*-. In a way, the amazing thing is that this happens rather infrequently, and even if it does happen it is a temporary phenomenon.

From childhood on, a person's brain is processing the data provided by acts of communication, generalizing the rules of acceptable utterances, classifying different varieties of the language, and determining which utterances are appropriate in which circumstances. Each person has, in effect, a grammar of the language in her own head.

Those people who are in closest communication with each other will have grammars that are relatively similar simultaneously on a number of different levels. Let us look, then, at some of the other aspects involved.

First of all, each person approaches a communicative situation with a complex set of expectations, some conscious, others unconscious. To begin with, he makes a judgment about what language (or languages) the other is going to speak. Once the other has opened his mouth it might seem as if the question is answered, but this is not necessarily the case. Philip Wylie tells of arriving in Hong Kong and having a young Chinese man knock on his door the first night. When the man began speaking, Wylie protested that he did not understand Chinese. Then suddenly he realized that the man was speaking fluent English. His mental set that a Chinese man will speak Chinese made him momentarily incapable of recognizing English when he heard it.

Furthermore, each person comes with his own phonemic system, which he uses both for producing utterances and for interpreting the utterances he hears. No person without rigorous phonetic training can hear a speech sound “as it really is.” The brain of each person categorizes the infinite variety of sounds into the discrete units of his own sound system. For this reason, Americans learning Marathi or Hindi are baffled when they are told that */T/*, */Th/*, */t/*, and */th/* are all different. English has only one */t/* category to match the four of Marathi or Hindi. Even within the same language not all speakers perceive the same distinctions; for example, uneducated Marathi speakers often cannot hear the difference between *Inl* (dental) and *IN!* (retroflex); or if asked to say */asel/* they will say */ashel/* because */sh/* is an automatic alternant of */s/* before */e/*. To those with any familiarity with linguistics these points are elementary. The only purpose of mentioning them here is to give another illustration of my point that communication is an activity proceeding at the same time on many different levels.

Not only does each speaker approach the other with certain expectations, but as soon as the conversation starts each begins to predict what will follow. When we are surprised by what someone has said it is because we have been expecting him to say something else. Writers, of course, make deliberate use of surprise. If they want to be naughtily suggestive they can get across what they want to say without using a single objectionable word. We may remember 'Sweet Violets', one version of which starts like this:

> There once was a farmer
> Who took a young miss
> In back of the barn where
> He gave her a lecture
> On horses and chickens and eggs
> And told her that she had such
> Beautiful manners . . .

The fun is, of course, that each time we supply the expected word and yet still feel surprise that the author has managed to get around saying it. In the case of the song, both the situation and the rhyme scheme lead us to expect particular words. But even nonsense syllables put into a meaningful grammatical structure will enable us to predict the form class of the following word. Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky": is an often-quoted example of this, and rightly so. Consider the opening lines:

> "Twas brilling and the slithy toves
>
> Did gyre and gimbol in the ________"

The speaker of English knows that the next word must be a noun which refers to the place where the loves were 'gyring' and 'gimboling'.

In addition to the activity mentioned so far, each person is unconsciously processing the linguistic information provided by the conversation. He stores in his brain notes on others' pronunciation (and its social correlates), he analyzes the meanings of words used and breaks up words into their component parts. The information gained from each conversation can later be drawn upon for understanding new utterances. Of course, we cannot observe this process directly, but we can infer it from people's 'mistakes'. Why, for instance, do so many people use 'disinterested' to mean 'uninterested'? It seems reasonable to say that they must have analyzed it as 'dis' + 'interested'. Because they know such words as disloyal, disfavor, disinclined, they know that dis- means 'not.' And the word 'interested' they have most often heard in the sense 'willing to engage one's attention.' They have rarely heard the older sense of ‘having a stake in.’ (cf, the interested party). In this example, of course, the person correctly analyzed the meaning of dis-; the problem was with ‘interested’. A word like ‘inflammable’ is a different case. Because of their experience with words like incapable, incompetent, and inflexible, some people have concluded (rightly) that ‘in’ is a negative prefix, and thus (not so rightly) that ‘inflammable’ means ‘not able to be ignited.’ For these people something in danger of being ignited is flammable. In the United States, at least, this misapprehension is so widespread that trucks carrying materials in danger of being ignited carry the warning Flammable.

Similarly, each person decides, on the basis of what he knows about the other, how literally the other’s statements are to be taken. Is he to be taken literally, is he understating, exaggerating or just plain lying? Is he being sarcastic or ironic? Whole works of art may be misunderstood if this basis question is not clarified. Many people have completely missed the point of Joyce’s “Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man” because they did not realize that Joyce’s treatment of the hero is ironic. In the same way others have read through “Joseph Andrews” without realizing that it is a parody.

Even more basic than the question of the literalness of the other's statements is the question of on what level she is speaking. Is she using the language to talk about experience (as is usually the case) or is she using it to talk about language itself ? I have found informants who were baffled by the relatively simple question, "What is the word for 'mother's brother ?" because they were not used to talking about language. Language for them is exclusively a tool for talking about things in the outside world, or for expression of thoughts and feelings.

In a language learning situation there is rapid shifting between two levels. For example, if the student says, "I want to go out," the teacher has to decide if this is a request for permission to leave the room, or a question about how to say that particular sentence in the target language. Failure to perceive such a shift may cause misunderstanding. Two American students were translating items in a Marathi paper, and talking about the meanings of words. Suddenly one of them pointed to a headline and said, "*aamce" '*our.' "Not *aamce*, but *amce*," the other corrected. The first was irritated by this pedantry, for he had been calling attention to the fact that the editor had referred to So-and-So as 'our man'; in other words, he was making a comment about politics. The other had assumed that they were still on the metalinguistic level – that is, talking about language.

More commonly, perhaps, misunderstandings occur when participants judge the degree of formality or technicality of a conversation. If the conversation is technical, meanings will be used with greater precision; the demand will be for definite information and a logical form of development. If the conversation is informal, meanings will be used more loosely; development will be anecdotal. Dell Hymes has cited the example of a group of women talking about child bearing. If the majority are interested in a serious discussion and exchange of information, the woman merely telling anecdotes about her son will be out of place. On the other hand, if the majority are simply chatting, the one who insists on being technical will be considered a bore.

Especially among educated people the shifts from technical to informal and back are likely to be subtle, and failure to perceive them may cause irritation. Surely many housewives have made statements like, “My god it’s hot, it must be 100 degrees” only to have their husbands reply, “Don’t be silly, the paper says that it hasn’t gotten above 90.” Situations like this must have given rise to the common retort, “Don’t be technical.”

The expectations of the participants in a communicative act are not limited to strictly linguistic matters. A number of extra linguistic factors are also involved. In the first place, each of the participants must assess what they have in common: nationality, social, political or religious group, war experience, membership in a particular club, or any of the thousands of kinds of experiences that can bind people together. The judgment of what is shared provides a frame of reference in terms of which the meanings of words and sentences can be understood. In Lyndon Johnson's office, if a staff member refers to the "the President" others can probably take it for granted that he means the President of the United States. But if a university professor involved in political activity talks about the "the President" the hearer has to decide which of the two contexts is the relevant one - the university or the wider national scene.

Along with assessing what is common between them, each speaker must judge what is the subject of the conversation. For people intimately related even the most oblique reference is sufficient. James notes this in "The Bostonians: 'She' between mother and daughter at this point could only refer to Olive Chancellor." In the intermittent conversation carried on during household chores changes of subject are often very rapid, and the inattentive may discover that they have missed a shift. When a servant asks, “Shall I put it here?” a busy housewife may say “yes” without stopping to see if she and the servant are talking about the same ‘it’ and ‘there’.

On the other hand, if people are concerned about common problems they may clearly understand even a deliberately disguised reference to it. During the Freedom Movement in India, for example, speeches and plays on ostensibly mythological or historical subjects were clearly understood as calls to carry on the struggle.

A language, then, is the communicative experience of a group of individuals, plus a set of rules that we can extract from it in order to describe and predict the form of acceptable utterances.

What Edward Sapir said of society as a whole applies equally to language:

> While we often speak of society as though it were a static structure defined by tradition, it is, in the intimate sense, nothing of the kind, but a highly intricate network of partial and complete understandings between the members of

> organized, rational groups of every degree of size and complexity, ranging from a pair of lovers or a family to a family of nations … it is only apparently a static sum of social institutions; actually it is being reanimated from day to day by particular, acts of a communicative nature which occur among individuals participating in it.

Maxine Berntsen, 1966 (Source: Personal collection)

Maxine Berntsen

Language and Life in Phaltan (1966 – 1985)

Phaltan countryside (Source: Personal collection)

When I first went to Phaltan in 1966, it was with the intention of doing my field work for the Ph. D., writing up my thesis and returning to the United States. But it was not to be. I stayed on in Phaltan until the end of 2011, a total of 45 years, the longest I have lived in any one place. In terms of my writing on language and culture the time from 1966 to 1985 was the most productive period of my life. I had the extraordinary luxury of spending all my time doing my own research and writing. Altogether during this period I was immersed in the language and the life of Maharashtra. By 1972 I realised that I wanted to make Phaltan my home. I applied for Indian citizenship and got it six years later - in 1978, the same year I informally started the work of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha.

Early days in Phaltan

During my time in Hyderabad I had been living in the Satwalekar home. Now in Phaltan I had to learn to run my own household. Irawati bai's daughter, Jai Nimbkar had arranged for me to rent a bungalow just down the road from where she and her family lived. I hired two servants, a woman to do the cooking and a man to look after the cleaning, gardening and shopping. For cooking I had a primus stove – a pressurised kerosene stove. To facilitate lighting and preventing the production of smoke I used methylated spirit. However, in order to buy spirit one had to get a license. I remember running around various government offices in order to make a payment of twenty five paise required for the spirit license. I had no refrigerator.

Jai Nimbkar
(Source: Personal collection)

On the whole I took this lifestyle in my stride but Jai pointed out that it wasn't necessary to live in this way. When the owner of the bungalow decided to sell the house I left it and moved to the guest apartment in the Nimbkar Seeds office building, which was next door to the Nimbkar bungalow. I got a second hand gas range from Jai and purchased a refrigerator as well.

In my own home I saw the working of untouchability at first hand. The man-servant belonged to the Scheduled Caste, while the woman was a member of one of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). When she wanted to hand him even a matchbox she would put it down on the floor so he could pick it up without touching her.

From the start the Nimbkar household provided a place for good talk and sharing on many levels. They had three daughters, Nandini, age 12, Manjiri (Manju), age 10 and Chanda, age 6. One of my earliest memories is of their daughters and their friends celebrating Navratri, the nine day period preceding the festival of *Dasera*. Every afternoon the girls would gather to sing *bhondla* songs which must have originally been intended to prepare young girls for an early marriage. All the girls joined hands in a circle and as they moved around, Nandini would sing a line and then all the girls would repeat it. One of the songs was about a young bride who had come back to visit her parents. Every day someone came from the in-laws with a gift but the girl rejected them all. Only when her husband came with a whip did she respond.

In the Nimbkar household, these songs were of course sung only for fun. Jai's grandfather, Dhondo Keshav Karve (popularly known as Maharishi Annasaheb Karve) had been a great social reformer whose life's work was the education and remarriage of child widows. Anti-ritualism and rationalism were a major part of the family legacy. Outside, however, the indoctrination of women was still very much alive. Just across the street from the Nimbkar house was the Jnaneshwar Temple where small groups of women regularly gathered for instruction by a religious teacher. I was taken aback when I heard the extent that he would go to in indoctrinating women about their duties to their husbands.

From the time I came to Phaltan I had been wanting to study some *bhakti* poetry, the work of the Marathi saint poets from the 13th to the 17th century. I went to see Uplekar Maharaj, a scholarly man who was highly regarded as a religious teacher. When I asked him if I could study with him, he dismissed me, with a contemptuous wave of his hand. A couple of days later he relented to the extent of sending Deshpande Master to be my tutor. Deshpande Master was a real gift. Together we read three chapters of the Jnaneshwari and some of the *bhakti* poems of Tukaram and others. I recall how he stressed the dangers of rote knowledge - knowing the words without understanding the spiritual meaning.

Royal Palace, Phaltan (Source: Personal collection)

Meanwhile I was exploring the town. It was an ideal size for exploring on a bicycle. I was living in Laxminagar, not far from the centre of the town. Within a distance of about 2 kms in any direction I could reach most of what I wanted to see. Phaltan had been a princely state headed by the royal family, Naik-Nimbalkars. There were a number of fine buildings, including the royal palace, with the adjoining Ram Mandir. The most wonderful structure was the Jabareshwar Mandir, dating back to the 13th century.

The countryside outside the town was flat, bare and rocky. About three miles outside the town limits was a magical place. It was the temple of Biroba, the god of the Dhangars (shepherd community). A short distance away was a shrine to a *pir*, a Sufi saint. The amazing thing about it was that it had no roof. When one went inside and looked up one could see the open sky within a circular frame of the walls.

Biroba Temple
(Source: Personal collection)

The changing of the seasons never failed to surprise me, so different were they from the pattern of spring, summer, fall, winter with which I had grown up. At the beginning of the summer some trees like *gulmohar, palash* and the silk cotton tree all lost their leaves, and then burst into brilliant flowers which stood out in the blazing sun. In some parts of the surrounding countryside the land was arid. Only where the water from wells or from the Nira Right Bank

Canal was available was it possible to grow crops. In parts of the surrounding countryside there was rich black cotton soil and a number of crops could be grown.

Field work

When I arrived, I had a reasonable command over spoken Marathi. Though I still had to hone my conversational skills I was able to understand a good deal of the language I heard around me. I had already noticed that there was a great deal of speech variation, both in terms of phonology and lexicon. Before I could do any systematic study of variation however I wanted to get a better sense of the variables involved. So I needed some authentic speech samples. I had a Uher reel-to-reel tape recorder, which was the state of the art equipment at that time.

By a fantastic accident it happened that the very first recording I made was a real treasure. I was talking to a Ramoshi. The Ramoshis were a nomadic tribe, which the British had declared to be criminal tribes. However, Malojiraje, the Raja of Phaltan had wisely brought them into the mainstream by making them guards.

The Ramoshi man I was interviewing immediately launched into a story, first setting the scene: “Look here: the Adarki road. We had gone on a leopard hunt with the rajah.” He went on to describe the hunt and all the game they brought back. I don’t know if any other recording I made in the course of my study had the drama that this one did.

Eventually I appointed a research assistant. I took Irawati bai's list of 690 informants and contacted every tenth one. In order to get extended samples of natural speech I prepared an interview schedule, consisting of several types of items including: direct questions on kinship terms, open-ended questions intended to elicit longer response, short answer questions designed to elicit a particular word etc. From my point of view the most interesting part of the questionnaire were the open ended questions where people could talk about ghosts, values and gods.

The field work took me to all parts of the town. Because of all I had learned from Eleanor Zelliot about Ambedkar's movement, I was especially interested in the lives of people in Mangalwar Peth, the Scheduled Caste area of town.

Most people were very cooperative. A few, particularly some illiterate people, were fearful of being interviewed, thinking that I was a spy, a government representative who would tax them or press them into military service or a missionary. One man however jolted me into thinking about the ethical implications of ethnographic research. After the interview was finished he said to me, "Right now you are talking to me as a friend. But you will never come back." I thought to myself that I would certainly return, but the truth is that I never did.

I became a familiar figure in Phaltan riding around on my bicycle with the Uher tape recorder tied on the luggage carrier. Field work was a great joy. I cannot say the same thing about the data analysis. Dr. Kavadi had kindly arranged to have one of his students do the transcription of interviews. My job was to take the transcription and find ten instances of each of the variables that I was looking at. This went on reasonably well until the drive belt of the tape recorder broke. After that for months on end I was using rubber bands. Each band lasted for only a few minutes. Then I would have to open up the machine and replace the broken band and screw the lid back on. At long last I managed to import a new belt but it meant going to the customs office in Mumbai to collect it. The story of my encounter with the medieval atmosphere of the place is too complicated to be described here.

A Uher tape recorder
(Source: www.reelprosoundguys.com)

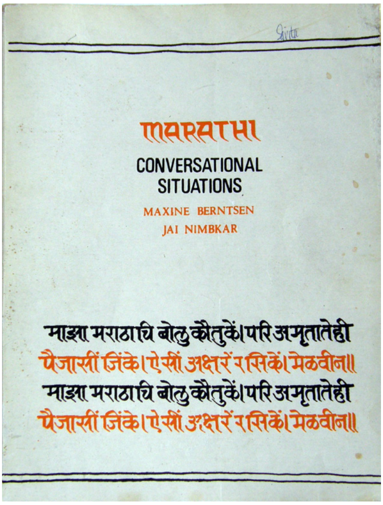
As I was doing my work I was in close touch with my advisers in the U.S., William Labov, Dell Hymes, Franklin Southworth and Richard Lambert. The other day in looking back at the file of correspondence, I was staggered at the amount of help I received from them. They all gave meticulous and detailed feedback. Labov and Lambert were particularly encouraging.

In those days there was no internet and e-mail. There were computers available but I did not have one. Even airmail letters took a long time. One advantage was that I did not have to type my own manuscripts, at least the final versions. I had a highly skilled typist. In addition, the statistical analysis of my data was done by a staff member of the Gokhale Institute in Pune.

By 1970, the thesis was nearly done. However, my fellowship had come to an end. In order to earn some money, I signed a contract with the Peace Corps to produce Marathi training materials for their volunteers. This delayed my work on the thesis. Finally by 1973, the thesis was complete and was approved by all the members of my committee.

Marathi for Americans

Meanwhile I had the good fortune to be able to go the U.S. every other year to teach Marathi for the spring term in the Associated Colleges of the Midwest India Studies programme, which prepared students to come to Pune for two terms. This enabled me to make enough money to live on for two years, as well as to keep in touch with family and friends in the U.S. and also in Norway.


Gita
MARATHI
CONVERSATIONAL SITUATIONS
MAXINE BERNTSEN
JAI NIMBKAR
माझा मराठाचि बोलु कौतुकें। परि अमृतातेही
पैजासीं जिंके। ऐसीं अक्षरें रसिकें। मेळवीन॥
माझा मराठाचि बोलु कौतुकें। परि अमृतातेही
पैजासीं जिंके। ऐसीं अक्षरें रसिकें। मेळवीन॥

Marathi Conversational Situations
(Source: Personal collection)

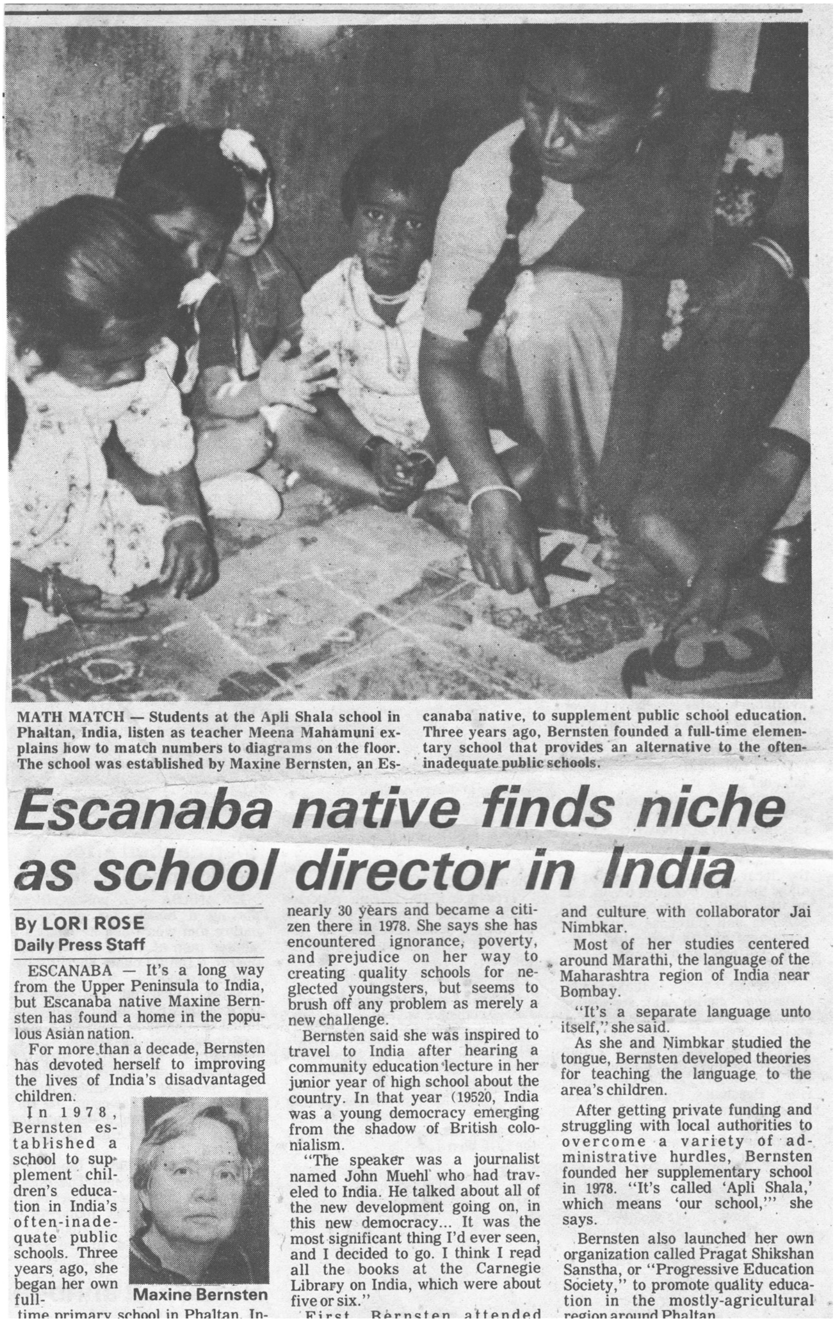
In addition I received financial support to produce two sets of Marathi teaching materials for adult learners of Marathi, particularly American students. Jai Nimbkar and I worked together for about twelve years, and produced two sets of materials. One set consisted of four books of intermediate and advanced materials, including a reference grammar, dictionary and two readers. The second set consisted of five books, including structural patterns, conversational materials, and other materials.

This huge volume of work would not have been possible without the help of Jai. A gifted writer in her own right, she is also highly disciplined and meticulous.

Deaths, a memorial, and an unfinished work

Many key figures in my life died during this period—Bhau and Aee, my father, Irawati Karve and her husband, to name a few. Eleanor Zelliot and I decided to bring out a volume in honour of Irawati Karve. We talked to a number of her former students, who responded readily. The book titled "The Experience of Hinduism" came out in 1980.

One other writing project from this time still remains incomplete. It is titled "Sharda: a Mahar Woman's Path to Selfhood". An article based on the material is included later in this volume.



MATH MATCH — Students at the Apli Shala school in Phaltan, India, listen as teacher Meena Mahamuni explains how to match numbers to diagrams on the floor. The school was established by Maxine Bernsten, an Escanaba native, to supplement public school education. Three years ago, Bernsten founded a full-time elementary school that provides an alternative to the often-inadequate public schools.

Escanaba native finds niche as school director in India

By LORI ROSE
Daily Press Staff

ESCANABA — It's a long way from the Upper Peninsula to India, but Escanaba native Maxine Bernsten has found a home in the populous Asian nation.

For more than a decade, Bernsten has devoted herself to improving the lives of India's disadvantaged children.

Maxine Bernsten

In 1978, Bernsten established a school to supplement children's education in India's often-inadequate public schools. Three years ago, she began her own full-time primary school in Phaltan. In-

nearly 30 years and became a citizen there in 1978. She says she has encountered ignorance, poverty, and prejudice on her way to creating quality schools for neglected youngsters, but seems to brush off any problem as merely a new challenge.

Bernsten said she was inspired to travel to India after hearing a community education lecture in her junior year of high school about the country. In that year (19520, India was a young democracy emerging from the shadow of British colonialism.

"The speaker was a journalist named John Muehl who had traveled to India. He talked about all of the new development going on, in this new democracy... It was the most significant thing I'd ever seen, and I decided to go. I think I read all the books at the Carnegie Library on India, which were about five or six."

First, Bernsten attended

and culture with collaborator Jai Nimbkar.

Most of her studies centered around Marathi, the language of the Maharashtra region of India near Bombay.

"It's a separate language unto itself," she said.

As she and Nimbkar studied the tongue, Bernsten developed theories for teaching the language to the area's children.

After getting private funding and struggling with local authorities to overcome a variety of administrative hurdles, Bernsten founded her supplementary school in 1978. "It's called 'Apli Shala,' which means 'our school,'" she says.

Bernsten also launched her own organization called Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, or "Progressive Education Society," to promote quality education in the mostly-agricultural region around Phaltan.

The Escanaba Daily Press, June 20th 1989 (Source:www.newspapers.com)

Beginning of Apli Shala and KNB (1978 - 2007)

…कर रिहॅबिलिटेशन केंद्र

Meeting with Apli Shala and KNB teachers (Source: Personal collection)

The following two sections includes material from the years 1978 to 2007 when my work was closely associated with the various educational initiatives that are now under the auspices of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha. The Pragat Shikshan Sanstha has evolved gradually throughout the years, but whatever we have done has been informed by a basic vision: that every child should attend school, and that no child should be forced to attend a school that will mutilate her spirit. Below is a description of how the schools began and an essay on an approach to inclusion of different religious traditions in education. The following section describes in more detail the methodology of language teaching that evolved over many years' practice and experience.

Apli Shala was started in 1978 and today includes a balwadi (pre-primary classes), and supplementary classes for school-going children.

Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan (KNB) is a full-time Marathi medium school with classes from pre-primary to Standard X (SSC). KNB, which was started in 1986, is recognized by the state government, but is unaided. The admission policy ensures that girls and boys are admitted in equal numbers, and all caste categories and social classes are given representation. Modest fees and a number of complete freeship and partial fee concessions mean that it is affordable and accessible to economically disadvantaged children.

As mentioned in the previous section, I also worked with Jai Nimbkar to prepare materials in Marathi both for teaching children and adults. The texts for teaching American students were regularly used both in Pune and in Lawrence University, Appleton, Winsconsin where I went as a visiting professor.

I also kept up a close correspondence with friends and family in the U.S.and that is reflected in the poems to my close friend Shelby Andress whose husband died during this period in 1999 after a prolonged illness.

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, Phaltan
Grounded Growth

This is the story of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, the education society I founded in Phaltan, a taluka town in Western Maharashtra, which in the 1970s had a population of about 40,000.

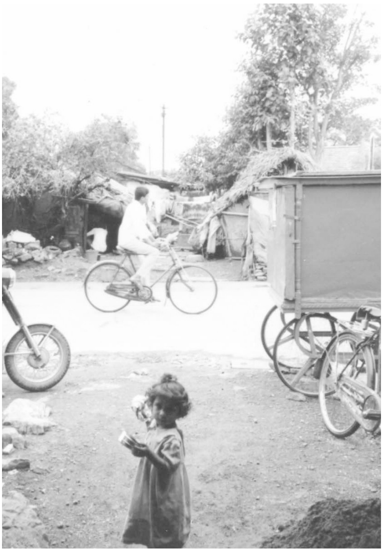
The story I tell here is, of course, not the whole story of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS, for short). It is a selection focusing on the angle of social justice, particularly in terms of access to school education and a comprehensive approach to developing a high quality, supportive learning environment. Special emphasis will be given to the teaching of language and literacy – both because it is the field in which I have done most of my work, and because I believe, as did Paulo Freire, that mastery of language and literacy is one of the keys to individual and collective empowerment.

The topic of my research was social variation in the Marathi speech of Phaltan. One of my research questions was whether or not speech variation was highly correlated with caste. I found that though prima facie there was a correlation between caste and speech, partial correlation analysis revealed that education was a more important variable than caste. To put it another way, a Scheduled Caste person with schooling up to SSC could not be identified as SC on the basis of his speech. In short, school education was enough to enable him to join the mainstream, linguistically at least.

By 1972 I realized that I wanted to settle in Phaltan and do something creative in the field of education. My conclusion about the importance of education was a further incentive to do what I wanted to do anyway - gather a group of out-of-school children and teach them to read and write. However, I had other tasks to take care of first. In 1973 my dissertation was completed and accepted, but I still had other writing commitments.

Early days

By 1978 I was free to try to round up the out-of-school children I had seen wandering around the bazaar. After a few unsuccessful attempts I finally assembled a group of children and started our classes.



Maharwada, Phaltan
(Source: Personal collection)

The children were all from the *Bhavani Mata zopadpatti*, the poorest and most marginalised area of the Maharwada – the Scheduled Caste quarter of Phaltan. A high percentage of the homes were broken homes, where widowed or abandoned illiterate women had to make a living and look after their children. The majority of these women made a living by stealing grass from farmers' fields and selling it to milkmen in town. Since Phaltan is a low rainfall area there were times when no grass was available, and then life became difficult indeed.

The men in this area mostly worked as casual labourers, hawkers, and junk sellers. Most of the children in the area were not enrolled in school, and if they were, they tended to drop out or were pressured out by the school authorities.

After we had conducted our classes outside for a month or so, the Municipality gave us an old dharmashala - a room 12’ x 12’- in Mangalwar Peth.

To begin with, I just wanted to run a non-formal literacy centre. However, there was one boy - I’ll call him Sumit - who seemed especially bright, and I felt he should go to the government school. When I mentioned this, not only did Sumit’s parents agree, but many parents said that they wanted to enrol their children - completely belying the common notion that the poor do not want to send their children to school.

While the parents were eager to put their children in school, the principal was reluctant to take them. When I shouted and argued enough, he admitted the children who had come with their mothers that day. But there was no assurance that the next lot would be admitted without hassles. Sometimes the principal was out, sometimes forms were not available.

Once the child was admitted to the school, his problems were not over. If he was absent for three consecutive days, the teacher would ask him to bring a note from his parents. If he did not bring the note, his name was struck from the roll. From time to time I had to take a child back to school, and fight with the teacher to let him sit in the class.

While not all school principals in the town were as antagonistic to Scheduled Caste children as this principal was, the police were convinced that Scheduled Caste children were criminals in the making. Sumit's experience in the third grade brings this out.

During the *Ram Jatra*, the big annual fair in Phaltan, Sumit was arrested in the bazaar because 'he was going to steal something'. The police sent him to the Remand Home in Satara, the district headquarters. He was kept there for fifteen days without a hearing. Since he had not been officially committed, he was not allowed to attend classes in the school. Finally the judge let me take him home. Back in Phaltan the police withdrew the charges, but the principal refused to take the boy back. Eventually through the offices of two sympathetic education officers, Sumit rejoined the school, but his spirit was broken. The next year we put him in a more welcoming school, but he fell sick and dropped out.

These vignettes suggest something of the complexities underlying statistics of non-attendance and school dropouts. The examples, of course, have only scratched the surface. The deeper reality is more grim. On the whole many townspeople had a deep distrust - even fear - of Scheduled Caste people. Once as I was crossing the intersection leading into the Maharwada, the educated upper class man accompanying me said with a shiver, "All the hairs on my body are standing on end." A prominent woman doctor explained to me that the reason Scheduled Caste people can't pronounce the language correctly is that their tongues are too thick !

The Scheduled Caste community was very aware of how they were viewed by the townspeople. One man said to me in appreciation of our work, "You realize these kids are human."

Consolidation and growth

Gradually I saw that rather than running an alternative programme, what we had to do was enrol children in school and help them stay and succeed there. This meant providing the support structure that middle class parents give their children – books, slates, uniforms, medical help if needed (either for the child or the parents), along with help in studies.

Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan
(Source: Personal collection)

It was clear that we needed a formal and legal structure. In 1984, the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha was registered as a society and a public trust. The support centre in Mangalwar Peth was given the name *Apli Shala* – 'Our School'. Two years later we started Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan (KNB), a Marathi medium school.

Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar

Because this note focuses primarily on the early years of Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, and that too, from the perspective of social justice, the account does not adequately present the major role played by Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar in the development of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha and KNB.

Manjiri Nimbkar and Maxine Berntsen (Source: Personal collection)

Manjiri began working in KNB part time, particularly focusing on science teaching and nature education. By 1995 she gave up her medical practice to devote her full time to KNB. Her skillful management helped to put the school and the PSS on a sound financial footing. She also taught English. Eventually she took over as principal of the school. In addition, she later ran the Reading and Writing Improvement Programme.

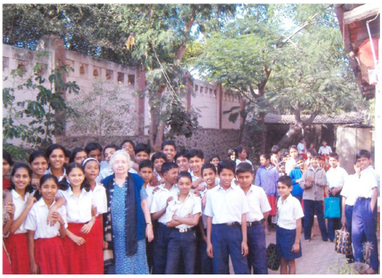
Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan

Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan is unquestionably the most comprehensive, robust and successful aspect of our work. It has been the laboratory for trying out our ideas of holistic education, working in a focused manner with a relatively small number of students. We had the luxury of developing the school a year at a time. The first batch reached SSC and passed out in 1997.

Dr. Suma Chitnis garlanding portrait of Kamalabai Nimbkar (Source: Personal collection)

Giving a detailed account of the school is not possible here. I can only highlight a few things – in particular, the admission policy, and the language and literacy programme.

We decided that we would have an admission policy that would ensure our student body was a representative cross-section of the population of Phaltan. We assigned a percentage roughly equivalent to the proportion of that category in the total population of Phaltan. As far as possible we had equal numbers of boys and girls. This admission policy resulted in a wonderfully diverse student body. Caste, class and communal tensions among the students were almost non-existent.



KNB Students
(Source: Personal collection)

Once the admissions policy was in place, we wore our ideology lightly. One incident, though, highlighted the danger of too much ideology. It was Mahatma Phule Jayanti. Student after student got up and made fiery speeches on how the Brahmins had oppressed the peasants. Suddenly I noticed that Ashwin, a Brahmin boy, was sitting there crying.

The medium of instruction was Marathi, which was the first language of most of the students. Teachers created an atmosphere in which students felt free to use their home language and to talk about their own experience.

We built up a good library, and students read avidly - especially stories with rural settings. Some astonishingly good writing - particularly poetry - was done by students from poor backgrounds. After a few years we started *Navneet*, an annual magazine with student writing in Marathi, Hindi and English.

The PSS Approach to Reading

Along with our first standard teacher I developed a method of teaching early reading and writing. The core of the method is a systematic teaching of sound-letter relationships. Like the traditional approach, it takes advantage of the fact that by and large there is a one to one relationship between sound and letter in the Devanagari script as used for Indian languages. Departing from the traditional method, however, we identified emotionally charged words in the child's vocabulary, and taught the basic letters and abbreviated vowel signs needed for these words. We stressed the need for phonemic awareness long before it became a fashionable buzzword.

This systematic method was accompanied by the language experience approach and the whole language approach of reading small books. The approach enabled almost all children to make rapid progress in reading and writing.

Educational Outreach

When I started KNB one of my aims was to make the school a resource centre for improving government schools. Duplicating the school as a whole would have been impossible. But training government teachers to use our approach to beginning literacy, and providing basic materials was a realistic goal. The opportunity to do

Apli Shala
(Source: Personal collection)

this opened up when I was given an Ashoka Foundation Fellowship in 1989.

To assess the basic literacy skills of children in the third standard in Phaltan taluka schools, I hired two people to conduct a survey. All eleven municipal schools were included, thirteen Zilla Parishad schools, and one large private school.

On the whole, our researchers found that the atmosphere in village schools was much more positive than in the municipal schools. In the village schools there was often a happy, active spirit; the children were involved in cleaning the classroom, carrying water or planting trees. In the municipal schools, on the other hand, it was as if the weight of the nearby slum was reaching out, laying its heavy hand on teachers and children alike.

In1997 we did a study of all ZP schools in the taluka. The students' performance was completely correlated with the caste hierarchy. But in 2007 when we assessed the results of our Reading and Writing Programme, (20 schools, 611 students) it was found that the caste category of a student had no effect on his score. This demonstrated that a sensible methodology, in the hands of a trained, motivated and caring teacher, can make a difference.

Maxine with ZP school teachers (Source: Personal collection)

Schools and NGOs may perhaps not make a fundamental impact on ushering in a more just society. But we can do something.

Essay on Secularism

Below is an essay on secularism that I presented at a conference of the Maharashtra Studies group at SNDT, Mumbai in 1992 organized by Dr. Meera Kosambi.

> Perhaps more explicitly than any other social institution, a school stands at the juncture of past and future. Its task, we like to think, is to prepare students for the future by transmitting to them the knowledge and skills their society has developed in the past. Of course, such a formulation is outrageously simplistic. At best it is applicable only to a small community in a period of minimal social change. In India, on the other hand, we have a new nation-state, a secular democratic republic with a population of enormous cultural, ethnic and religious diversity – people who are heirs to a process of civilization extending back into ancient times. Moreover, like the rest of the world India is careering into the twenty-first century and perhaps not even the most audacious futurist can envision the economic, social and environmental conditions that will face those coming into maturity twenty five years from now. We, in this relatively new nation, prepare our children for

an uncertain future we must also look critically at what we have inherited from the past identifying what in our collective past experience can help us prepare for the future, and identifying also which areas in which there is tension between the fundamental principles of the new nation-state and the structure and values of the traditional society.

Let us begin with the areas of tension. One of these is the concept of equality. While the Constitution declares that there shall be no discrimination against a person on account of sex or caste, there remains serious discrimination against women and unequal relationship among castes, so much so that some observers have called the Indian *homo hierarchicus*.

Another area of tension is the concept of secularism. Since Independence the idea of the secular nation-state has been juxtaposed with a polity fragmented on religious and communal lines. While fundamentalist forces - Hindu, Muslim, Sikh - have been present since the inception of India as a modern nation, in recent years the Hindu right wing has moved from a marginal position to center-stage in national politics. The destruction of the Babdri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 on the pretext that it was built on the site of a temple marking the birth place of Lord Ram was undoubtedly a watershed in contemporary

Indian history. Today, emboldened by their political and extra-political success, some right-wing leaders openly talk about their dream of a Hindu society.

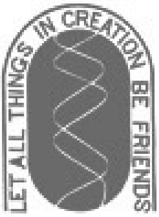
In this situation it is imperative that we define what we mean by secularism in various areas of public life. This paper is an account of our attempt to do so in the context of the Kamala Balbhavan, a small school in rural Maharashtra. It relates our efforts to define an initially vague conception in response to questions arising in the day-to-day working of the school. Our confusion and inconsistencies are painfully evident, some became clear to me only in the process of writing this paper. What I offer here, thus, falls far short of a consistent, well-articulated philosophy. I hope however, that this account of the action and reflection can serve to identify some of the issues that arise in trying to define secularism in the context of an Indian school today.

Our organisation, the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (Progressive Education Society) began by running a non-formal education program for Scheduled Caste children in Phaltan. Later in 1986 we started the Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan (KNB), a private (government-recognised, but unaided) Marathi medium school.

From the start I had taken for granted that the school should be secular, but I had little sense of how imprecise the word is – or perhaps I should say, how vague my own conception of it was. To begin with, it meant that the school should not be a Christian school. This was especially important in my case because some towns-people suspected that I had come to Phaltan to proselytize. I was equally adamant that it should not be a Hindu school. While rejecting the identification of the school with any particular religion I felt that secularism did not mean hostility to religion. Children need a sense of community, a community formed partly by the sharing of the spiritual values and a reference for something transcending their own immediate group. For small children the primary need is for a caring community, one that teaches them that they can trust the society and world outside their immediate family but for adolescents the need is, perhaps, more for emotional fervour.

Obviously, to some extent patriotism is a value that offers children an opportunity to direct their emotion at an entity larger than their immediate group. Loyalty to the nation is vitally important, and is something most schools in India try to inculcate through the teaching of history, the celebration of national festivals and the performance of daily ritual: the singing of the national anthem and other patriotic songs, and the reciting of the national pledge: “India is my country, all Indians are my brothers and sisters.” In the Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan we share the conviction, as do most liberals in India, that fostering a sense of national pride is essential. At the same time we recognize that making the state the sole focus of reverence and emotion can be dangerous.

Fortunately in India we are heirs to a tradition that offers a vision transcending sectarian and national boundaries and celebrating humanity and the kinship of all living beings. In Marathi one of the finest expression of his visions is the Pasayadan, the concluding passage in the Jnaneshwari, the famous thirteenth-century Marathi commentary on the Bhagvad Gita by the poet Jnaneshwar. In the Pasayadan Jnaneshwar addresses the Universal Spirit and says, “ If you are pleased with what I have composed, grant me a boon.” And what does he ask for?: “ Let all things in creation be friends.” This is the line we have adopted as the motto for the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha, and as a symbol of the same concept we have used the double helix pattern of DNA, which again captures the concept of unity of all life.


LET ALL THINGS IN CREATION BE FRIENDS

PSS Logo
(Source: PSS)

This then was our overall approach. Beyond that, as the school developed we - that is teachers, staff, parents and I - have been engaged in a dialogue trying to define what secularism means in the day to day working of our school. Below I outline how the form of the morning assembly has taken shape after discussion with the teachers.

From the establishment of the Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan we have started the morning assembly with Pasayadan. We also begin other school programs with Pasayadan, so that the prayer has become a symbol of the school community. Some time ago a sympathetic observer pointed out that the prayer is in thirteenth century Marathi, and the majority of children do not understand what they are singing. This is perhaps true, and we are trying to do a better job of helping children to understand the words of the prayer. But the main thought comes through, in the line quoted earlier: "Let all living creatures be friends."

Moreover, we need not insist that right from the start children intellectually understand everything they sing. For the youngest children the singing of the Pasayadan means that the school community is starting the day in the reverent singing of a very beautiful prayer.

The second prayer we use is, by contrast, simple enough for even the youngest children to understand: *Patils deva tujhe kiti sundar aakash,* "God, how beautiful is your sky." As the first line indicates, the song is in praise of the beauty of nature, the sky, the sun, the moon, the trees, flowers, and birds. It concludes with the line: *Ituke sundar jag tujhe jar, kiti tu sundar asasheel* "If your world is beautiful, how beautiful you must be." At times we also sing the English hymn: "For beauty of the earth/ For the glory of the sky/ Lord of all, to thee we raise/ This our hymn of grateful praise."

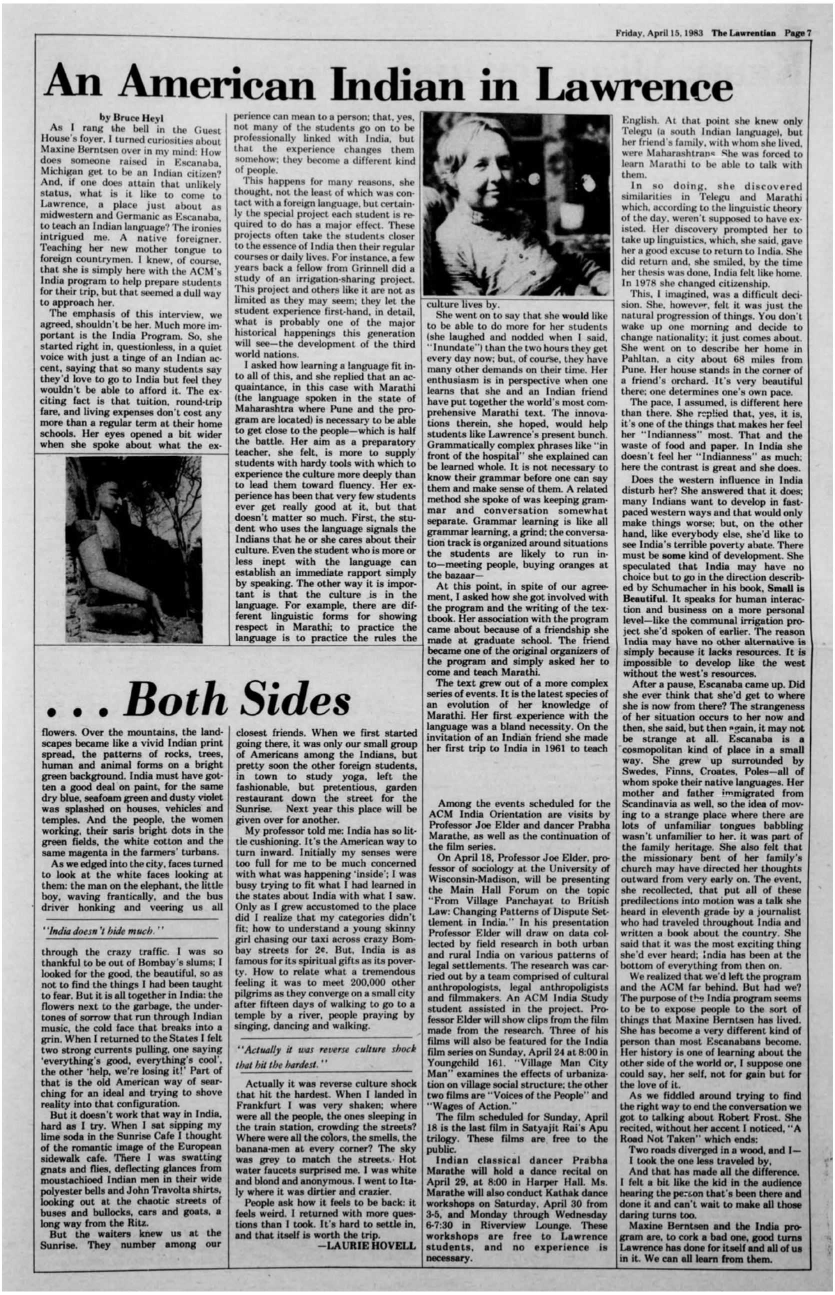
Both these songs express reverence for the earth, a reverence that cuts across any sectarian differences. We were gently reminded by our most ideologically committed Buddhist teacher, however, that even these prayers are not acceptable to strict Buddhists, as Buddhism rejects the idea of God as the creator. The teacher did not press the point, and none of the other Buddhist parents objected, so we have continued to use the songs.

Several years ago a potentially divisive disagreement occurred. Some of our teachers started including in the morning assembly verses addressed to Sharadadevi, the goddess of learning. The verses typically describe the goddess clothes in her snow-white garments, sitting on a peacock, strumming the *veena*. Songs to Sharadadevi are often sung in school, and even the Government Teacher Training College celebrates a Sharada festival every year. When I objected to the use of these verses, some teachers argued that as Sharada is a symbol of learning there is nothing objectionable in singing songs in her praise. However, it is exactly this depiction of the Divine in a concrete image that is the anathema to Muslims and to some Jains, Buddhists, and Christians as well.

For a while we wondered if the answer might be found in the concept of the *sarva dharma samabhav*: equal respect for all religions. Thus we could balance the verses to Sharadadevi with the Buddhist prayer *Buddham saranam gacchammi*: “I go to the refuge of the Buddha.” However a little discussion and reflection soon made it clear that this would not be appropriate. The Buddhist prayer is a very potent, emotion-laden symbol for those Scheduled Caste persons who have rejected Hinduism and embraced Buddhism. It is properly sung only by those who mean it. Moreover, non-Buddhist parents could conceivably object to their children singing a prayer so clearly identified with a religion challenging their own. We finally concluded, then, that the morning assembly should not be a selection of prayers from various religions, but an expression of the loyalty and reverence that we hold in common, whatever our religious background.

In addition to the prayers and songs already mentioned we later added some verses from the *manache shlok* of Ramdas, the seventeenth century saint poet. Ramdas was arguably the least poetic of the saint poets. Some of this teaching was aimed at providing a code of ethics - and everyday etiquette - for the masses. For example his famous *murkhachi lakshane*, 'Indications of a fool', includes such lines as "He who walks down the street eating is a fool." The *manache shlok* are moral maxims in verse, e.g. "Allow no evil desires in your heart, allow no sinful thought in your heart, bear with low speech from others, but always speak humbly yourself." My lukewarm comments probably reveal that I am less than thrilled by the m*anache shlok,* but they serve to link our students with a treasured part of the Marathi tradition.

To prevent the assembly from getting too long we usually alternate the use of *manache shlok* with 'For the Beauty of the Earth'. The assembly closed with *Vande Mataram*, a patriotic song, and the national pledge. (The national anthem *Jana Gana Mana* is sung at the end of the day.) The whole assembly takes about fifteen minutes.



Friday, April 15, 1983 **The Lawrentian** **Page 7**

An American Indian in Lawrence

by Bruce Heyl

As I rang the bell in the Guest House's foyer, I turned curiosities about Maxine Berntsen over in my mind: How does someone raised in Escanaba, Michigan get to be an Indian citizen? And, if one does attain that unlikely status, what is it like to come to Lawrence, a place just about as midwestern and Germanic as Escanaba, to teach an Indian language? The ironies intrigued me. A native foreigner. Teaching her new mother tongue to foreign countrymen. I knew, of course, that she is simply here with the ACM's India program to help prepare students for their trip, but that seemed a dull way to approach her.

The emphasis of this interview, we agreed, shouldn't be her. Much more important is the India Program. So, she started right in, questionless, in a quiet voice with just a tinge of an Indian accent, saying that so many students say they'd love to go to India but feel they wouldn't be able to afford it. The exciting fact is that tuition, round-trip fare, and living expenses don't cost any more than a regular term at their home schools. Her eyes opened a bit wider when she spoke about what the experience can mean to a person; that, yes, not many of the students go on to be professionally linked with India, but that the experience changes them somehow; they become a different kind of people.

This happens for many reasons, she thought, not the least of which was contact with a foreign language, but certainly the special project each student is required to do has a major effect. These projects often take the students closer to the essence of India then their regular courses or daily lives. For instance, a few years back a fellow from Grinnell did a study of an irrigation-sharing project. This project and others like it are not as limited as they may seem; they let the student experience first-hand, in detail, what is probably one of the major historical happenings this generation will see—the development of the third world nations.

I asked how learning a language fit into all of this, and she replied that an acquaintance, in this case with Marathi (the language spoken in the state of Maharashtra where Pune and the program are located) is necessary to be able to get close to the people—which is half the battle. Her aim as a preparatory teacher, she felt, is more to supply students with hardy tools with which to experience the culture more deeply than to lead them toward fluency. Her experience has been that very few students ever get really good at it, but that doesn't matter so much. First, the student who uses the language signals the Indians that he or she cares about their culture. Even the student who is more or less inept with the language can establish an immediate rapport simply by speaking. The other way it is important is that the culture is in the language. For example, there are different linguistic forms for showing respect in Marathi; to practice the language is to practice the rules the culture lives by.

She went on to say that she **would** like to be able to do more for her students (she laughed and nodded when I said, "Inundate") than the two hours they get every day now; but, of course, they have many other demands on their time. Her enthusiasm is in perspective when one learns that she and an Indian friend have put together the world's most comprehensive Marathi text. The innovations therein, she hoped, would help students like Lawrence's present bunch. Grammatically complex phrases like "in front of the hospital" she explained can be learned whole. It is not necessary to know their grammar before one can say them and make sense of them. A related method she spoke of was keeping grammar and conversation somewhat separate. Grammar learning is like all grammar learning, a grind; the conversation track is organized around situations the students are likely to run into—meeting people, buying oranges at the bazaar—

At this point, in spite of our agreement, I asked how she got involved with the program and the writing of the textbook. Her association with the program came about because of a friendship she made at graduate school. The friend became one of the original organizers of the program and simply asked her to come and teach Marathi.

The text grew out of a more complex series of events. It is the latest species of an evolution of her knowledge of Marathi. Her first experience with the language was a bland necessity. On the invitation of an Indian friend she made her first trip to India in 1961 to teach English. At that point she knew only Telegu (a south Indian language), but her friend's family, with whom she lived, were Maharashtrans She was forced to learn Marathi to be able to talk with them.

In so doing, she discovered similarities in Telegu and Marathi which, according to the linguistic theory of the day, weren't supposed to have existed. Her discovery prompted her to take up linguistics, which, she said, gave her a good excuse to return to India. She did return and, she smiled, by the time her thesis was done, India felt like home. In 1978 she changed citizenship.

This, I imagined, was a difficult decision. She, however, felt it was just the natural progression of things. You don't wake up one morning and decide to change nationality; it just comes about. She went on to describe her home in Pahltan, a city about 68 miles from Pune. Her house stands in the corner of a friend's orchard. It's very beautiful there; one determines one's own pace.

The pace, I assumed, is different here than there. She replied that, yes, it is, it's one of the things that makes her feel her "Indianness" most. That and the waste of food and paper. In India she doesn't feel her "Indianness" as much; here the contrast is great and she does.

Does the western influence in India disturb her? She answered that it does; many Indians want to develop in fast-paced western ways and that would only make things worse; but, on the other hand, like everybody else, she'd like to see India's terrible poverty abate. There must be **some** kind of development. She speculated that India may have no choice but to go in the direction described by Schumacher in his book, **Small is Beautiful**. It speaks for human interaction and business on a more personal level—like the communal irrigation project she'd spoken of earlier. The reason India may have no other alternative is simply because it lacks resources. It is impossible to develop like the west without the west's resources.

After a pause, Escanaba came up. Did she ever think that she'd get to where she is now from there? The strangeness of her situation occurs to her now and then, she said, but then again, it may not be strange at all. Escanaba is a cosmopolitan kind of place in a small way. She grew up surrounded by Swedes, Finns, Croates, Poles—all of whom spoke their native languages. Her mother and father immigrated from Scandinavia as well, so the idea of moving to a strange place where there are lots of unfamiliar tongues babbling wasn't unfamilier to her. it was part of the family heritage. She also felt that the missionary bent of her family's church may have directed her thoughts outward from very early on. The event, she recollected, that put all of these predilections into motion was a talk she heard in eleventh grade by a journalist who had traveled throughout India and written a book about the country. She said that it was the most exciting thing she'd ever heard; India has been at the bottom of everything from then on.

We realized that we'd left the program and the ACM far behind. But had we? The purpose of the India program seems to be to expose people to the sort of things that Maxine Berntsen has lived. She has become a very different kind of person than most Escanabans become. Her history is one of learning about the other side of the world or, I suppose one could say, her self, not for gain but for the love of it.

As we fiddled around trying to find the right way to end the conversation we got to talking about Robert Frost. She recited, without her accent I noticed, "A Road Not Taken" which ends:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I felt a bit like the kid in the audience hearing the person that's been there and done it and can't wait to make all those daring turns too.

Maxine Berntsen and the India program are, to cork a bad one, good turns Lawrence has done for itself and all of us in it. We can all learn from them.

. . . Both Sides

flowers. Over the mountains, the landscapes became like a vivid Indian print spread, the patterns of rocks, trees, human and animal forms on a bright green background. India must have gotten a good deal on paint, for the same dry blue, seafoam green and dusty violet was splashed on houses, vehicles and temples. And the people, the women working, their saris bright dots in the green fields, the white cotton and the same magenta in the farmers' turbans.

As we edged into the city, faces turned to look at the white faces looking at them: the man on the elephant, the little boy, waving frantically, and the bus driver honking and veering us all through the crazy traffic. I was so thankful to be out of Bombay's slums; I looked for the good, the beautiful, so as not to find the things I had been taught to fear. But it is all together in India: the flowers next to the garbage, the undertones of sorrow that run through Indian music, the cold face that breaks into a grin. When I returned to the States I felt two strong currents pulling, one saying 'everything's good, everything's cool', the other 'help, we're losing it!' Part of that is the old American way of searching for an ideal and trying to shove reality into that configuration.

"India doesn't hide much."

But it doesn't work that way in India, hard as I try. When I sat sipping my lime soda in the Sunrise Cafe I thought of the romantic image of the European sidewalk cafe. There I was swatting gnats and flies, deflecting glances from moustachioed Indian men in their wide polyester bells and John Travolta shirts, looking out at the chaotic streets of buses and bullocks, cars and goats, a long way from the Ritz.

But the waiters knew us at the Sunrise. They number among our closest friends. When we first started going there, it was only our small group of Americans among the Indians, but pretty soon the other foreign students, in town to study yoga, left the fashionable, but pretentious, garden restaurant down the street for the Sunrise. Next year this place will be given over for another.

My professor told me: India has so little cushioning. It's the American way to turn inward. Initially my senses were too full for me to be much concerned with what was happening 'inside'; I was busy trying to fit what I had learned in the states about India with what I saw. Only as I grew accustomed to the place did I realize that my categories didn't fit; how to understand a young skinny girl chasing our taxi across crazy Bombay streets for 2¢. But, India is as famous for its spiritual gifts as its poverty. How to relate what a tremendous feeling it was to meet 200,000 other pilgrims as they converge on a small city after fifteen days of walking to go to a temple by a river, people praying by singing, dancing and walking.

"Actually it was reverse culture shock that hit the hardest."

Actually it was reverse culture shock that hit the hardest. When I landed in Frankfurt I was very shaken; where were all the people, the ones sleeping in the train station, crowding the streets? Where were all the colors, the smells, the banana-men at every corner? The sky was grey to match the streets. Hot water faucets surprised me. I was white and blond and anonymous. I went to Italy where it was dirtier and crazier.

People ask how it feels to be back: it feels weird. I returned with more questions than I took. It's hard to settle in, and that itself is worth the trip.

—LAURIE HOVELL

Among the events scheduled for the ACM India Orientation are visits by Professor Joe Elder and dancer Prabha Marathe, as well as the continuation of the film series.

On April 18, Professor Joe Elder, professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, will be presenting the Main Hall Forum on the topic "From Village Panchayat to British Law: Changing Patterns of Dispute Settlement in India." In his presentation Professor Elder will draw on data collected by field research in both urban and rural India on various patterns of legal settlements. The research was carried out by a team comprised of cultural anthropologists, legal anthropoligists and filmmakers. An ACM India Study student assisted in the project. Professor Elder will show clips from the film made from the research. Three of his films will also be featured for the India film series on Sunday, April 24 at 8:00 in Youngchild 161. "Village Man City Man" examines the effects of urbanization on village social structure; the other two films are "Voices of the People" and "Wages of Action."

The film scheduled for Sunday, April 18 is the last film in Satyajit Rai's Apu trilogy. These films are free to the public.

Indian classical dancer Prabha Marathe will hold a dance recital on April 29, at 8:00 in Harper Hall. Ms. Marathe will also conduct Kathak dance workshops on Saturday, April 30 from 3-5, and Monday through Wednesday 6-7:30 in Riverview Lounge. These workshops are free to Lawrence students, and no experience is necessary.

An American Indian in Lawrence (Source: The Lawrentian)

Transcription of **An American Indian in Lawrence by Bruce Heyl**
April 15th 1983

As I rang the bell in the Guest House's foyer, I turned curiosities about Maxine Berntsen over in my mind: How does someone raised in Escanaba Michigan get to be an Indian citizen and if one does attain that unlikely status, what is it like to come to Lawrence, a place just about as midwestern and Germanic as Escanaba, to teach an Indian language? The ironies intrigue me. A native foreigner, teaching her new mother tongue to foreign country men. I knew of course that she is simply here with the ACM's Indian program to help prepare students for their trip, but that seemed a dull way to approach her. The emphasis of this interview, we agreed shouldn't be here. Much more important is the India program. So, she started right in, question less in a quiet voice with just a tinge of an Indian accent, saying that so many students say they would love to go to India, but feel like they wouldn't be able to afford it. The exciting fact is that tuition, round trip fare and living expenses don't cost any more than a regular term at their home school. Her eyes opened a bit wider when she talked about what the experience can mean to a person; that, yes, not many of the students gone on to be professionally linked with India, but that the experience changes them somehow; they become a different kind of people. This happens for many reasons, she thought, not the very least of which was contact with a foreign language, but certainly the special project each student is required to do has a major effect. These projects often take the students closer to India than the regular courses or daily lives. For instance, a few years back a fellow from Grinnell did a study of an irrigation – sharing project. This project and others like it are not as limited as they may seem; they let the student experience first-hand, in detail, what is probably one of the major historical happenings this generation will see- the development of third world nations. I asked how learning a language fit into all of this, and she replied an acquaintance, in this case with Marathi(the language spoken in the state of Maharsahtra where Pune and the program are located) is necessary to be able to get close to the people – which is half the battle. Her aim as a preparatory teacher, she felt, is more to supply students with hardy tools with which to experience the culture more deeply than to lead them towards fluency. Her experience has been that very few students ever get really good at it. But that doesn't matter. First the student who uses the language signals the lndians that he/she cares about their culture. Even the student who is more or less inept with the language can establish an immediate rapport simply by speaking. The other way it is important is that the culture is in the language. For example there are different linguistic forms for showing respect in Marathi; to practice the language is to practice the rules the culture lives by. She went on to say that she would like to do more for her students (she laughed and nodded when I said "inundate") than they two hours they get everyday now; but of course they have many other demands on their time. Her enthusiasm is in perspective when one learns that she and an Indian friend have put together the world's most comprehensive Marathi text. The innovations therein, she hoped, would help students like

Lawrence's present bunch. Grammatically complex phrases like 'in front of the hospital' she explained can be learned whole. It is not necessary to know their grammar before one can say them and make sense of them. A related method she spoke of was keeping grammar and conversation somewhat separate. Grammar learning is like all grammar learning, is a grind; the conversation track is organized around situations the students are likely to run into - meeting people, buying oranges at the bazaar...

At this point, in spite of our agreement, I asked how she got involved with the program and the writing of the textbook. Her association with the program came about because of a friendship she made at graduate school. The friend became one of the original organizers of the program and simply asked her to come and teach Marathi. The text grew out of a more complex series of events. It is the latest species of an evolution of her knowledge of Marathi. Her first experience with the language was a bland necessity. On the invitation of an Indian friend she made her first trip to India in 1961 to teach English. At that point, she knew only Telugu (a south Indian language), but her friend's family, with whom she lived, were Maharashtrians. She was forced to learn Marathi to be able to talk with them.

In so doing, she discovered similarities in Telegu and Marathi, which according to the linguistic theory of the day, weren't supposed to have existed. Her discovery prompted her to take up linguistics which she said gave her a good excuse to return to India. She did return and, she smiled, by the time her thesis was done, India felt like home. In 1978 she changed citizenship.

This, I imagined, was a difficult decision. She, however, felt it was just the natural progression of things, you don't wake up one morning and decide to change nationality; it just comes about. She went on to describe her home in Phaltan, a city about 68 miles from Pune. Her house stands in the corner of a friend's orchard. It's very beautiful there; one determines one's own pace.

The pace, I assumed, is different here than there. She replied that, yes, it is. It's one of the things that makes her feel her 'Indianness' most. That and the waste of food and paper. In India she doesn't feel her 'Indianess' as much; here the contrast is great and she does.

Does the western influence in India disturb her ? She answers that it does; many Indians want to develop in fast paced western ways and that would only make things worse; but, on the other hand, like everybody else, she'd like to see India's terrible poverty abate. There must be some kind of development. She speculated that India may have no choice but to go in the direction described by Schumacher in his book, "Small is Beautiful." It speaks for human interaction and business on a more personal level – like the communal irrigation project she'd spoken of earlier. The reason India may have no other alternative is simply because it lacks resources. It is impossible to develop like the west without the west's resources.

After a pause, Escanaba came up. Did she ever think that she'd get to where she is now from there ? The strangeness of her situation occurs to her now and then, she said, but then again, it may not be strange at all. Escanaba is a cosmopolitan kind of place in a small way. She grew up surrounded by Swedes, Finns, Croates, Poles – all of whom spoke their native languages. Her mother and father immigrated from Scandinavia as well, so the idea of moving to a strange place where there are lots of unfamiliar tongues babbling wasn't unfamiliar to her, it was part of the family heritage. She also felt that the Church may have directed her thoughts outward from very early on. The event, she recollected, that put all of these predilections into motion was a talk she heard in the eleventh grade by a journalist who had travelled throughout India and written a book about the country. She said that it was the most exciting thing she'd ever head; India has been at the bottom of everything from then on.

We realized that we'd left the program and the ACM far behind. But had we? The purpose of the Indian program seems to be to expose people to the sort of things that Maxine Berntsen has lived. She has become a very different kind of person than most Escanabans become. Her history is one of learning about the other side of the world or I suppose one could say, her self, not for gain but for the love of it.

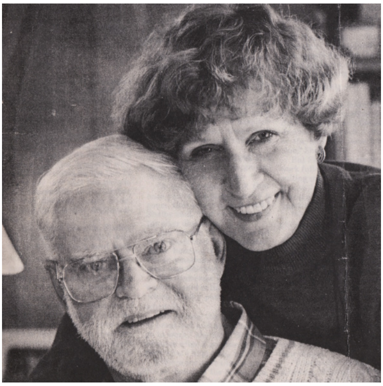
As we fiddled around trying to find the right way to end the conversation we got to talking about Robert Frost. She recited, without her accent I noticed, ‘A Road Not Taken’ which ends:

> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
> I took the one less traveled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

I felt a bit like the kid in the audience hearing the person that’s been there and done it and can’t wait to make all those daring turns too. Maxine Berntsen and the India program are, to cork a bad one, good turns Lawrence has done for itself and all of us in it. We can all learn from them.

Poems related to Jim Andress

Shelby is a friend I kept in contact with ever since we met at Augsburg. We never communicated more than about once a year but it did not make much difference. Jim, her husband, was about twelve years older than she was. He was from Northern Minnesota up in the woods and a wonderful educator.



Jim and Shelby Andress
(Source: Personal Collection)

He was in charge of a large suburban school system. He loved his job of mentoring teachers. However, when the Baby Boom ended, it became necessary to retrench teachers. At time he had to go to court to defend the decision to dismiss a teacher. He hated this role, and finally resigned.

Shortly afterwards he began experiencing the first symptoms of Alzheimer's disease. On one occasion the family had gathered together and were decorating Easter eggs. Jim left half of his egg blank and painted an exploding flower on the other half and he said, "This is how I am feeling. Half of my brain I cannot access and on the other half I have an explosion of feeling I have never experienced before."

While he was still aware of what was happening, I wrote this poem to him.

TO JIM ANDRESS

Something of Northwoods calm,
Of dawn-lit slews,
Deer- pasture dusk,
Have stayed with you –
A gravity and grace that holds us in.
Now rods and cones of sight have dimmed,
Your ears cannot distinguish mallards' cries,
And fumbling hands and brain-cells now impose
Indignities: spilled food and open flies.
But still you're there,
A present, gracious pool,
And when you're not
We'll look for you out there,
In woods, in deer- filled meadows and in slews.
Come meet us there, at least from time to time,
With strength restored, with sure and agile feet,
Leap 'cross that stream, and once more straight and tall,
Walk with us through the wilderness of grief.

After Jim's death in 1996 Shelby put Jim's ashes in the Botanical Gardens because of the suggestion of this poem.

Shelby and Jim went on a TV program to talk about these experiences. I imagine it was very helpful to a lot of people.

When Shelby found out that Jim was legally blind, I was here in India and she was in America. Phone conversations were poor comfort. I wrote this for her.

TO SHELBY

What use are words, what comfort
As your words
Echo through space?
How can I hold you via satellite?
But wait for me.
I'll hold you when I come
And let you be a child a while at least.
No arms can fend off dark and pain for long,
But rest in mine,
And take my fragile peace.

I wrote a couple of poems after he died too. This is one of them.

GOD KNOWS WHAT FEARFUL FORCES

God knows what fearful forces stormed his brain,
Tossed twisted neural masses on its shore,
And battered him, not once but time and time again
Until he lay a broken, ravaged man.

But let me say he dared to face the storm,
To chart its winds, to sound that inland sea,
And let me say he did not sail alone,
For you were there – wife, mother, pilot, friend,
And when he sank at last it was your face
He saw, your lips that sealed his end.

Now you are left, exhausted, weighted down
By memories and thoughts too deep to ken,
But sail on, Voyager,
May gentle God give you fair winds
And guide you to Her havens now and then.

Shelby tells me that these poems are continuing to have an impact on many people, particularly those who have some experience with Alzheimer's - as sufferers, caregivers or physicians.

2001
12
Happy Birthday

Maxine Berntsen (Source: Personal collection)

Maxine Berntsen

Developing an Approach to Language Teaching (1978 - 2007)

Manjiri Nimbkar and Maxine Berntsen (Source: Personal collection)

One of the major areas of work in the PSS was evolving a methodology for students to learn reading and writing. The Reading and Writing Improvement Programme was started in 2005-06 and continues to work with First Standard children and their teachers in Zilla Parishad Schools. Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar was in charge of the programme which has had a number of components including periodic workshops for the teachers, free distribution of *Apan Vacu Ya* to all children in the project schools, support visits to the schools, and periodic testing of the students by the team of resource persons.

In addition, material was made to sensitize teachers about issues related to language and particularly about the links between culture and language. In this section there is a description of how the film ‘Immersed in Language’ was made. The film is about the young child’s way of learning language through interaction in a community setting.

There is also an article about how Indian languages can be taught to young children through an eclectic and balanced method of combining phonics and more expressive, so-called ‘whole language’. This is elaborated on in a discussion which is transcribed about the PSS Approach to Reading and Writing.

Finally there is an article specifically for teachers on standard and non-standard language.

Immersed in Language

The first film that was directed by Maxine Berntsen, is called *Bhashet Nhaun Nightana*, ‘Immersed in Language’. The film shows unscripted interaction between children, or children and adults, and tries to show how children acquire language naturally in the course of everyday situations.

भाषेत न्हाऊन निघताना
लहान मुलांच्या
मौखिक भाषेचा विकास

Immersed in Language
(Source: PSS)

Below is my journal entry for a Course on Language and Education about how theory and experience come together. I chose to reflect on the making of the film 'Immersed in Language'.

March 15, 2015
Does the theory we read come alive in the context of field experience, or does the theory help us understand what we see in the field? Or does it work both ways? The other day in discussing these questions with a friend, I was reminded of my experience several years ago of making the short film 'Immersed in Language'.

We were working on a full-length film on our method of teaching early literacy. I felt it would be helpful to have a brief introduction to the development of oral language in children. I had in mind the standard picture of the infant's cooing and babbling, uttering her first words, etc. When I showed the outline to my friend she suggested that I re-read Chapter 2 in Barbara Rogoff's "Apprenticeship in Thinking" (Rogoff, 1990), In this chapter Rogoff talks about the event as a key unit in child development. Not only was I familiar with the chapter, I had liked it very much. But somehow it hadn't occurred to me that it would be useful in the context of making the film.

Meanwhile we had checked on two or three locations, but found them unsuitable—either because of the distance from the town, an insufficient number of children, or other problems. Finally we settled on the Dalit vasti (hamlet) in Vinchurni. It was near the town and had a good number of children of all ages. Most importantly, perhaps, we had connections with some of the leading members of the community. Although I hadn't started with the idea of filming only Dalit children, the fact that everyone was Dalit helped sharpen the focus.

Before we started the shooting I spent two days going around the vasti. It was a surprisingly pleasant place, with none of the stark poverty one saw in some sections of the Dalit quarter in the nearby town. One of the reasons for the pleasant atmosphere was that the village was the beneficiary of the Indira Avas Yojana, the government scheme for housing for Scheduled Castes. The majority of the families lived in small but neat white houses lined up along the street. The main street was paved, providing something like the plaza Shirley Brice Heath described in her study of Trackton, a Black community in the Carolinas. (Brice Heath, 1983)

Best of all were the children – the littlest in the arms of adults or older children, the bigger ones in mixed or same-aged groups—playing 'laghor' ('seven stones') or marbles, riding bikes, or just walking or running around.

At the end of two days I knew I didn't want a script. I wanted to film spontaneous interaction. I told the film maker what I had in mind. He understood, but we didn't have a clear plan of action.

On the first day of shooting I stayed inside someone's house. The film maker and his crew had done a lot of wildlife photography where the cameraman focuses on one place, such as a waterhole, and waits for the various animals to appear. The team tried the same technique, but by the end of the day they had only one sequence—a group of three small boys quarrelling over a tricycle.

It was clear that we had to change our strategy. I decided that we should focus on some of the children who had struck me in my first two days of observation. These included an infant getting an oil massage and bath, a toddler in several interactions, a pre-school boy passionately playing marbles.

This worked. The shooting of the oil bath was slightly staged. I wanted to have a woman sitting next to the baby sing a song, but it was so artificial that we finally muted her voice. But other things just happened. I saw that we were seeing what Rogoff had called events. Actually they were usually a sequence of events that could be called a story—like the toddler who is eating mud being playfully scolded by his grandmother, feeling momentarily lost when she goes inside, then crawling over to call her, and joyfully seeing her come back. We saw examples of apprenticeship like those described by Rogoff –

especially the pre-school boy learns to play marbles with an older boy, marginally participates in helping to fix the chain on the bicycle, and plays cricket with the same older friend.

Barbara Rogoff's chapter gave me a way of seeing. The theory helped me understand what I saw, and what I saw made the theory come alive. Moreover the field experience - limited as it was – helped me see connections with other things I had read. The scenes on the pavement in front of the houses, the casual way in which non-family members – adults or older children – took care of small children were reminiscent of what is described by Shirley Brice Heath. These striking parallels between Heath's descriptions and my very limited observations suggested significant cross-cultural patterns.

In short, what we read – whether theory or ethnographic description – and what we experience in the field mutually illumine each other. In some cases one may correct the other, but the dialogue between text and experience can enrich our understanding of social reality.

Teaching Early Literacy In Indian Languages

Published in 'Learning Curve', Issue XIII, October 2009. A Newsletter from Azim Premji Foundation.
Reproduced with permission.

When a child enters school at the age of five or six, she already has a basic grasp of her first language. She has a vocabulary of at least 4,000 words, and a mastery of basic grammar. This means she can interact with others and carry on a conversation. Moreover, she has in her head a model of the world that organizes and structures the life experience that she has had up to this point.

Once she goes to school, her major task for the first three years is to become literate, that is, to learn to read and write what she already knows on an oral basis. In the process of becoming literate, the child also takes some of the first steps in developing a reflective awareness of what she has hitherto known only on an unconscious level.

Western Debate on Teaching of Early Literacy

In Western countries particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, the method of teaching early literacy has long been a matter of intense debate. Traditionally, children were taught by the phonic method in which the emphasis was on mastering decoding - that is, learning the sound-letter correspondences. In the 1930s, a new method was adopted, which started children on learning a basic vocabulary of about 50 words by whole-word recognition ('sight method'). This method came under attack in 1955 with the publication of Rudolf Flesch's "Why Johnny Can't Read". Flesch argued that the sight method had produced a generation of learners who could neither read nor spell. Since then there has been a great deal of experimentation and intense debate on reading methodology, with some experts advocating the systematic teaching of phonics and others the 'whole language approach' which argues that children learn to read and write by active engagement with meaningful texts. For some time the debate became so bitter that it was referred to as the 'Reading Wars'. In some cases the debate has had political overtones, with conservatives advocating the teaching of phonics.

Lack of Debate in India

In India, on the other hand, there has been little debate and experimentation on the methods of teaching early reading. At times there has been a tendency to accept uncritically the received wisdom from the West - often with a considerable time-lag.

In what little discussion there is, it is seldom taken into account that there is a crucial difference between the problems of teaching early reading in English on the one hand, and in the majority of Indian languages on the other. English spelling is chaotic because the spelling system was established long ago. This meant that the pronunciation of the words went on changing while the spelling remained constant. As a result, a given letter of the alphabet (especially a vowel) can be pronounced in several ways, and a given sound can be represented by several different letters. In short, there is a poor fit between sounds and letters.

Sound-letter Fit in Indian languages

The situation in Indian languages is quite different. To take Marathi as an example, barring a few exceptions, each character of the Devanagari script is to be pronounced in only one way, and each sound can be represented by only one character. On the face of it, therefore, learning to read an Indian language should be a far simpler task than learning to read English.

The traditional method of teaching reading in India focused on this correspondence of character and sound. Students memorized and learned to recognize the basic characters of the Devanagari script, the *mulakshare* in the traditional order, an order brilliantly laid down by the ancient grammarians, who had analysed the place and manner of articulation of each sound. Along with each character, the child memorized a word starting with that character - the Indian language equivalent of 'a for apple.' After learning the *mulakshare* the child learned the *barakhadi* in which an abbreviated vowel sign (along with the *anusvar* and *visarga*) is added to each consonant character. After that the learner turned to the symbols for the conjunct consonants (*jodakshare*), perhaps the one place where the script lacks transparency. Once a child had learned the code, she was introduced to words, sentences and longer texts in the form of stories or poems.

This is a very logical, systematic method and millions of Indians have learned to read in this way. However, it has its drawbacks, especially in a classroom situation where many children are first-generation school goers. There may be a considerable time period before the child is actually able to read meaningful material. Thus the process of acquiring decoding skills requires a good deal of application and perseverance. For this reason, the method probably works best in a situation where the home atmosphere is supportive of learning and study.

Common sense suggests that in teaching early literacy in India we should take advantage of the near-perfect fit of pronunciation and script. This means teaching letter recognition - phonics, if you will. But at the same time we can incorporate in our approach an opportunity for the child to be introduced to meaningful and emotionally appealing texts. This is what I have tried to do in developing the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS) approach to reading.

The PSS Approach

The approach I developed in 1987 is by no means radical or revolutionary. It is probably very much like what successful teachers have been doing for years. It has three parts:

1. A systematic teaching of sound-character correspondences (decoding)
2. Writing down experiences narrated by the children and then helping them to read the written account (organic

reading/language experience approach)
3. Reading of additional material stories, poems, etc.

Decoding: The second and third parts, organic reading and reading of additional material, are perhaps self-explanatory, and their content will, of course, vary from time to time. The constant core of the PSS method is the decoding part, for which we have written a small primer titled, *Apan Vacu Ya* (Let's Read). If there are any special insights in my approach, they are perhaps in this area of decoding.

First of all, I realized that in preparing children to read, too little attention is given to the development of phonemic consciousness. As a child learns to speak, she unconsciously acquires the phonemes of the language. Before she can learn to read, this unconscious knowledge must become conscious. Only then does it make sense to say, for example, "This sign represents the sound 'm'."

Once children are aware that their speech consists of sound units, we can teach the graphic shapes of letters (characters), words and sentences. Among experts there is disagreement as to which of these should be taught first. What I have done is start with three letters, two vowel signs, and one word for sight recognition: *ai* - 'mother.' Then, in the same lesson, I have introduced all the words that can be made from these letters, and all the sentences that can be made from the words.

In selecting the letters to be taught, I used Sylvia Ashton Warner's insight that we should begin with words that are emotionally charged for the child. Though I made no attempt to elicit a key vocabulary for each child, I started with the words referring to the child, her mother, and her mother's brother. The words selected were: *ha/hi* 'this'; *mi* 'i'; *majha/majhi* 'my'; *ai* 'mother'; *mama* 'maternal uncle'; *mami* 'maternal uncle's wife.'

In order to use these words it was necessary to introduce some of the abbreviated vowel signs (*matras*) from the outset. This first lesson introduced the kana (*aa ki matra*) and the velanti (*ii ki matra*). By introducing two or three of these signs in each lesson, we immediately open up the number of words the child can read. After only five or six lessons the child is ready to read a short poem or connected story (at the beginning, only a few sentences long).

Role of the Teacher

Ultimately no method, no textbook is teacher-proof. I have had the excruciating experience of watching a teacher use our primer to teach her pupils to memorize the sentences in the lesson. We can give teachers well-constructed textbooks provide them with supplementary materials, but in the final analysis teachers have to have some conception of what reading is, and some skill in class management to organize instruction for children at varying levels of mastery. How to train teachers to do this is, unfortunately, is beyond the purview of this note.

References

1) Margaret Donaldson, in her classic study, Children's Minds (1978. London: Fontana) develops this idea very perceptively.

2) Jeanne S. Chall covers this debate up to 1967 in the first chapter of her Learning to Read: the Great Debate (1967, McGraw Hill). For a more up to date survey see Robinson, Rihard D.; McKenna, Michael C.; and Wedman, Judy M. (1996). Issues and Trends in Literacy Education. Allyn and Bacon. In the United States, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2002 includes a Reading First Initiative which strongly advocates the use of phonics. One extreme fallout of this Initiative is the widespread use of a test called 'Dibels' (Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills). This test has been severely criticized by Kenneth S. Goodman in The Truth About Dibels: What It is, What it Does (2006). Portsmouth NH. Heinemann.

3) The Pragat Shikshan Sanstha has produced a DVD film in Marathi titled Pragat Vachan Paddhati (the PSS Approach to Teaching Reading). A version with English subtitles will be available shortly.

4) Today the need for phonemic awareness is widely accepted. In fact, it is included in the National Reading panel report of 2000, which formed the basis for NCLB. I hasten to add that while I would concur with some aspects of the report, I am totally opposed to the NCLB Act, which is a draconian measure.

Pragat Vachan Paddhati

The second film that was made is, *Pragat Vachan Paddhati*, 'The PSS Approach to Reading'. This film presents in detail the various aspects of the methodology developed by using live classroom interaction and is interspersed with a commentary by Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar and myself.

प्रगत वाचन पद्धती
मुलांना
साक्षर
करण्याचा
एक
सक्षम
मार्ग

Pragat Vachan Paddhati
(Source: PSS)

Some extracts of the dialogue in the film are translated from Marathi and are given below:

Maxine: It is very important to teach children to recognize letters. But just letter recognition is not sufficient. Along with that, the child's experience has to be taken into account. This is the specialty of the PSS approach to reading – combining letter recognition with the child's own experience.

Manjiri Nimbkar and Maxine Berntsen
(Source: PSS)

The PSS approach to reading

Here a clip is shown of a class discussion on rain. The children respond when asked about their experience of the rainy season with many examples: “We make paper boats. The road gets flooded. Fish and crabs come in the canals. There is mud everywhere” etc.

Manjiri: It is very important that such rich experience of children comes to the school. Like the children’s descriptions: the water flows in rivulets, children catch fish in the streams, the tin roofs of the house are blown away. Children feel happy that their experiences have come to school.

Maxine: Yes, they understand that whatever they talk, whatever they experience can be written and can also be read. This is very important and children feel extremely happy about it.

Manjiri: Very true. They must be feeling like they have made a new discovery.

Manjiri: Many teachers ask that in your PSS Approach to reading why do you teach the letters ‘*ma*’, ‘*ha*’ and ‘*jha*’ in the very first lesson?

Maxine: Just think. Which words are charged with emotion?

Manjiri: To the children?

Maxine: Yes. For children *aiai* (mother) *maamaa* (maternal uncle). They often feel closer to their maternal uncle than their own father. *Maami* (maamaa’s wife) *maajha* (my) *mi* (I’) …

Teaching of Phonemic Awareness

Manjiri: But why is teaching phonemic awareness so important?

Maxine: Actually children can pronounce words. They talk. They can talk so they know how to pronounce Marathi words. And they can form sentences in everyday interaction. Right.

PSS Approach to reading and writing (Source: PSS)

But to learn how to read, they should understand that they pronounce words. They have to learn to think about the pronunciation.

That is, they don't realize that they use words and that the words are composed of different sound units.

This is a completely new kind of awareness for them. But once they start to get it, half our work is done.

Manjiri: Yes, that means our job is to help children reflect on what they know unconsciously.

Introduction to Vowel Signs and Pronouncing Consonant and Vowel Signs Together

Manjari: One more thing that teachers tend to ask is, in the PSS approach to reading, why have we included abbreviated vowel signs (*matras*) in the first lesson itself?

Maxine: The reason behind this is that most of the words have *matras* in them.

Manjiri: Right.

Maxine: If we insist on using only the words without *matras*, the sentence will become very artificial – like *Sharad phanas uchal.* (Sharad pick up the jackfruit.)

Maxine: *Aai ghar bagh.* (Mother, look at the house.)

Manjiri: *Kamal naman kar.* (Kamal, fold your hands.)

Manjiri: Most of the words in children's experiences are written with *matras*. If children learn matras early, then they will quickly learn to read the words they already know orally.

Reading Sentences

Manjiri: Teachers won't even believe that the children can read sentences from the first lesson itself.
Maxine: Although the children aren't memorizing. They understand each letter and each word. This is significant. This means that they can actually read.
Manjiri: Yes, but for this, one important thing is that this first lesson requires a great deal of practice.
Maxine: Well, that is true. It may take three weeks just to teach the first lesson.
Manjiri: Absolutely. But once children understand how to do it, they learn the following lessons very fast. And often what happens is that they start reading small storybooks, even before they have been introduced to all the letters.
Maxine: Yes, this is very important. It means that it is not necessary to learn the whole alphabet before starting to read.
Manjiri: And what a joy it is to be able to read a book!
Maxine: Yes, and finally, that's what our aim is, isn't it?

Field Visit

Maxine: We have seen that children experience a great many things in their daily life. But in addition we can also consciously give children new experiences in school.

Manjiri: When children go for a field visit, they can talk about the visit the next day. What did they see? How did they feel? And even if they can't write, they can express their experiences through pictures. And teachers can write down these experiences in a line or two, put them under the pictures and again read them aloud to the children.

Standard and Non-standard Language: The Teacher's Stance

We often hear comments like, "Ignorant people speak *ashuddhə* (impure) language." "That person can't even pronounce the retroflex *n,* and says *pani-loni*." "These days there's no point in sending children to Marathi medium schools - leave alone the children's, even the teachers' language is *ashuddhə*."

The statement "So and so speaks *ashuddhə* Marathi" makes sense only if that person is not a native Marathi speaker. One can use the word *ashuddhə* to refer to the Marathi speech of a foreigner like myself. But how can we use it in regard to the speech of a genuine native speaker, who has been using the language since childhood? So sentences like "*mya kam kelə! tyo manus titə gelta*." "*lye Iok lai gvad boltyati*" are not *ashuddhə*; they are non-standard[1].

Now the question arises: how did the standard and non-standard varieties of a language develop? Even experts in linguistics cannot give a definitive answer to this question, but roughly we can say

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1 The standard variants would be: *mi kam kelə, to manus tithe gela hota, te lok phar god boltat.*

something on the following lines. First of all, a language is always changing. Pronunciation changes, new words come into the language. Old words fall out of use; sentence structures, prefixes and suffixes change. After some time the language changes so much that out of a single language several languages develop. In this way. Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and most other North Indian languages all developed out of Sanskrit. After Marathi came into existence it too underwent changes. Today we cannot easily read the Jnaneshwari, a thirteenth century text. We need to make a special study of it, or read it along with a modern translation. In comparison the '*abhangas*' of Tukaram from the seventeenth century are much easier to read, but there too we sometimes have difficulty understanding the words or the grammar.

Just as language changes over time it also changes over space. That is, it varies from place to place. There is a saying in Marathi, *bara kosavə r bhasha badəlte* ("A language changes every twenty-four miles.") Today although the saying is no longer literally true, its general point is still valid. If someone says, "*mi kərun rahilo*", we immediately recognize that he is from Vidarbha. Similarly, we can often recognize someone from Malwan or Kolhapur.

Just as language varies according to place it also varies according to social group within a single area. It is often thought that in Indian languages speech varies according to caste, but in a study I did twenty years ago I discovered that for Marathi, at least, this is not the case. What I found in the survey was that in Marathi speech varies mainly according to education rather than caste. This means that no matter what caste a person is from, if he is educated he will use the standard variety of the language. The most interesting thing is that the speech of a person of limited education will be a mixture of standard and non-standard forms. For instance, he might sometimes say *lok boltat*, sometimes, *lok boltyat* (but never *lok boltyati*).

Now we have to ask ourselves an important question: how does a particular variety of a language come to be recognized as the standard? The answer is that in the political and cultural life of a linguistic area, a particular region becomes dominant, and within that region a particular class becomes dominant. Thus the speech of that class gains cultural prestige - that is, it becomes the standard. In the case of Marathi, in the eighteenth century, during the rule of the Peshwas, Pune became the political and cultural center of Maharashtra. So the language of the educated class of Pune came to be recognized as the standard. In this process, some words and forms that once were considered standard came to be recognized as non-standard. For instance, today if anyone giving a speech used the word *l∂i* instead of *pusk∂l* (both mean 'very'), people would laugh; but in the thirteenth century Jnanesvar himself used *I∂i*.

Thus it is clear that if it is only a matter of historical accident that a particular variety of a language becomes the standard, it makes no sense to refer to that variety as *shuddh∂* and all others as *ashuddh∂*. Actually, these so-called *ashuddh∂* varieties are as logical and rule-governed as the standard variety. Let us look more closely at the speech of the majority of the people in Western Maharashtra - a variety that we could describe as the 'standard non-standard'. First of all, let us consider the example given above: *mya kam kelə* (l did the work.) In standard Marathi we say *ti kam kərte* (She does the work). But in the past tense we require the *kər məmi prəyo*:, so we say *tini*, or *tinə* instead of *ti: tint kam kelə*. But with the first person pronoun *mi* this change does not take place: *mi kam karte, mi kam kela*. In rural speech, on the other hand, this change in case is signaled by the use of *mya* instead of *mi*, as *mya* indicates that the instrumental postposition *ni* is understood to follow. That is, the form *mya* is, if anything, logical and is actually closer to the old literary language.

Sometimes this rural speech clearly reflects social customs and mores. For instance in rural speech the words *mavlən* (aunt-maternal or paternal) or *atya* (paternal aunt) are used for mother-in-law instead of the word *sasu* which is used among Brahmins. This reflects the practice among the *bahujansamaj* (the non-Brahmin castes) of a girl marrying her father's sister's son (so her father's sister becomes her mother-in-law.) For the same reason, among these castes a girl's father's sister's son is called her *mehuna* (from *mə ithun* - someone she can marry) and a man's mother's brother's daughter is called *mehuni*.

Now let us see how pronunciation in rural dialects is rule governed. We cannot look at all the rules of the 'standard non-standard' but will confine ourselves to three examples.

1. At the beginning of a word and in the middle of a word *ye* is used instead of *e*. For example: *yek* instead of *ek*, *dyev* instead of *dev*.

2. At the beginning of a word or in the middle of a word *v∂* or *va* is used instead of *o*. For example: *v∂l∂* instead of *ol∂*, *gvad* instead of *god*.

3. The vowel *∂* or *i* is inserted in a conjunct consonant occurring at the beginning of a word. For example: *p∂ rtap*, instead of *pr∂tap*, *gir∂th* instead of *gr∂nth*.

Rural speech is not only logical and rule-governed, it has strong emotional connotations for its users. In fact, the speech of childhood - be it non-standard or standard - has indissoluble links with the experience of childhood. Sometimes hearing even a single word of one's childhood speech will bring back happy or bitter memories. A Marathi man once gave me a very vivid example of this from his own experience. He had left India and settled in London. Occasionally he had an opportunity to talk Marathi but for the most part he used English. Then one day he met a woman relative who had come from India. In the course of the conversation she used the word *ishsh-a* word impossible to translate, but one expressing a kind of feminine shyness. "Say it again, say it again," he told her. That is to say, hearing the word brought to mind tender memories of the womenfolk in his childhood home.

Similarly, those speakers who spoke a rural dialect in childhood and later switched to the standard often feel pleasure or a sense of affinity when they hear their childhood dialect. The famous rural writer Anand Yadav once told me that just hearing *ay* instead *ai* (mother) touches his heart. But on the other hand, if a person's childhood experience has been one of hardship, suffering or humiliation, he may not want to hear his own dialect, and if he does hear it, he is likely to feel sorrow, shame or anger.

On the whole, there is no question that rural dialect is a powerful form of language, fully deserving our respect. Then you might well ask: if rural dialect has so many virtues, what is the need for a standard variety of a language? In answering this questions we must keep in mind that there are two kinds of standard language-spoken and written. For a particular spoken variety of a language to become recognized as the standard there is no need for any committee to sit down and make a decision. In the course of linguistic interaction that variety comes to have the status of the standard. Just as people copy the dress of the elite class of society, so they also copy the speech of the elite. That means that even if tomorrow the government declared that from such and such a date the rural dialect of Marathi would be recognized as the standard, such a declaration would be unlikely to have much effect on the way people speak. Without a fundamental social change there is not going to be any change in the matter of which class will set the norms of speech prestige.

However, in the matter of written language the situation is somewhat different. In Maharashtra the Board of Literature and Culture determines the rules for the written standard. Of course, these *anusvar* rules are based on the spoken standard, but the details of orthography - the use of the rules governing vowel length, etc. are determined by the Board. Moreover, once the rules are announced, prestigious institutions and individuals make an attempt to follow them.

Now let us look again at the question we asked earlier: what is the need for the standard? If an individual wishes to move in elite society, it is advantageous for him to use standard speech - or to be able to use it when required. For one thing, if he doesn't use the standard there may be times when he is misunderstood. Moreover, if he uses a rural dialect people's attention will be drawn to the dialect rather than to the content of his speech. If he does not want that to happen it is more convenient for him to use the standard variety.

In personal interaction which language variety one wants to use is a matter for that person to decide. However, in the case of written language the question is not confined to the individual but concerns the whole society, and there is a real need for written language to be standardized. In newspapers, non-fiction writing, in courts, business and technology it is important that language be unambiguous. It is important that all persons working in a particular field use the language of that field in the same way.

This facilitates communication among themselves. This means that the variety of language to be used, the meanings of words and the style of writing should be fixed. In law a change of a word, or the presence or absence of a comma can have serious consequences. In computer technology there is absolutely no tolerance for ambiguity in the use of terminology or symbols. This unambiguous language is, of course, the standard.

So far we have seen that both rural dialects and standard language are important in different ways. Now the major question we have to ask ourselves is as teachers what stance should we take toward these varieties of language ?

In some areas - particulalry in tribal areas - there is a great difference between the language of the school children and the standard language. Here I will not discuss what a teacher should do in this kind of situation. What I want to say now applies primarily to a situation where children speak what I have termed the standard non-standard dialect.

In this matter people often take either one of two extreme position. Some people say that children should be taught in their own dialect, and their textbooks should be in that dialect. These people argue that there is a great difference between the children's speech and the standard language, and the children will be unable to undertand the standard. But the fact is that in regard to pronunciation and grammar there is so little different between the dialect and the standard that children generally have very little difficulty in understanding. Often children, without even realising it, translate the teacher's words into their own dialect. For example, once I was teaching the *bhondla* [2] song '*Nanda -bhavjay- doghijə ni'.* When I sang "*mi nahi khallaə, va hinini khalllə"* [3], the children immediately repeated *"mya nahi kahlllə…",* making the grammatical change used in their dialect.

To put it briefly, there is no need to take the extreme position that we should teach children only through their own dialect. The other extreme position is that from the beginning we should teach children to speak the standard. In my opinion, this position is also wrong. From class one to four the most important thing is to get children to talk. I feel that at this stage we should not ty to change their pronunciation. If a child enthusiastically starts to tell *tin ha sva lanchi gosht* (The Story of the Three Bears), and we interrupt to say "Bala, it's not 'h*ə* sv*ə*l, say asv*əl*'" what will happen ? Often the child won't dare speak, and will remain silent, and if this kind of correction continues, he will develop a sense of inferiority about his own speech - and about himself.

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[2] *Bhondla* songs are those sung by children – mainly girls- during the period of Navaratra. They are often about the trials of a young bride in her in-laws' home. The song referred to here is about a quarrel between the young bride and her sister – in-law.

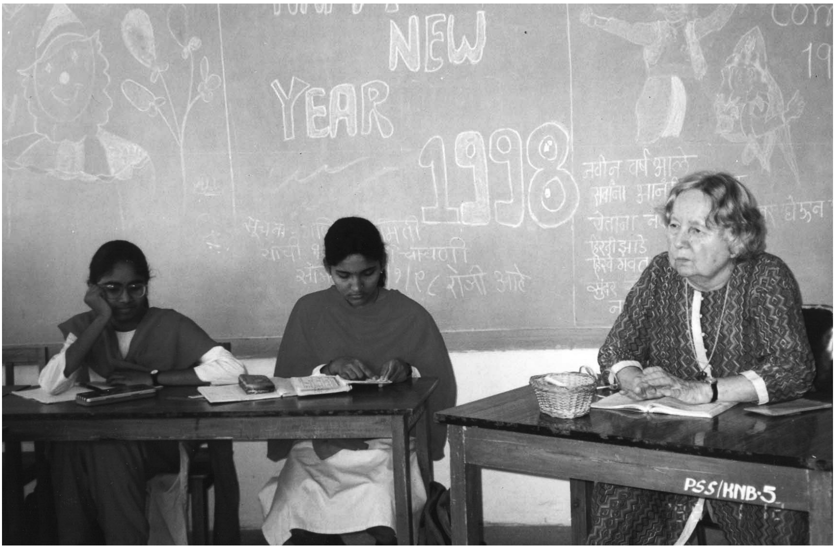
[3] "I didn't eat it, my sister-in-law did."

The amazing thing is that without the teacher's making any special effort, gradually in the atmosphere of the school, the children's speech will take on the charactersitics of the standard. If that is the case, what responsibility does the teacher have in helping children acquire the standard?

The first responsibility is helping children to increase their vocabulary. In the first three classes the langauge of the textbooks is very easy. But in the fourth standard there is suddenly a big jump in the size and level of difficulty of the vocabulary. At times a single lesson is about the Konkan (the coastal strip of Maharashtra), the children of the Desh (plateau area) will be unfamiliar with the locale and the words associated with it: words for 'ocean', 'rowboat'. 'fishermen' etc. In this situation the teacher should put the text aside and acquaint the children with the whole environment. If she can do it with the help of photographs or slides, all the better. Then while teaching the lesson the other unfamiliar words can be dealt with – the various poetic words for 'ocean', (*sagar, d∂rya*) or the word for 'limitless' (*∂thang*) etc.

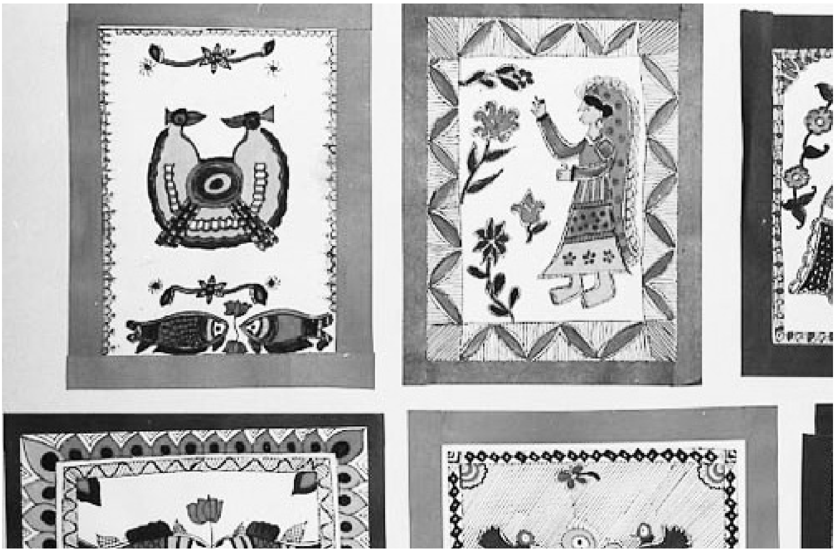
By the time children reach class five, their thinking skills have developed, and they have a basic mastery of reading and writing skills. At this time we can make them aware of the differences between rural and standard speech, and have them practice using the standard. Along with this, it is important to have them practice writing in standard orthography – *shuddah∂lekh∂n*. However, while doing this we must make it clear that rural speech is not *ashuddha*, is not wrong, is nothing to be ashamed of – that it is, on the contrary, an invaluable treasure.

In this way, if we avoid either extreme position and take a middle course honoring both the children's home-language and the standard, children will learn to use both language varieties with self-confidence and skill.



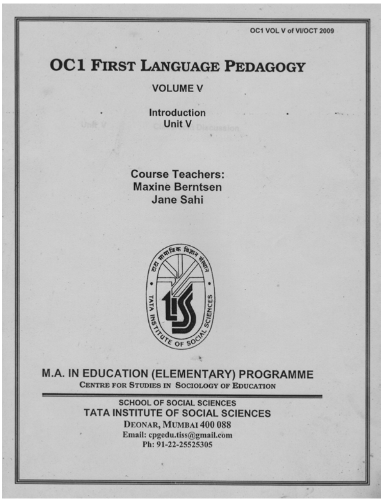
Maxine Berntsen interacting with students (Source : Personal collection)

CLLC and Other Projects, Return to Hyderabad (2000 - 2015)



KNB Arts Education Program (Source: PSS)

The beginning of the 21st century was an exciting time generally for those in education in India and certainly for me. Thanks to Manjiri Nimbkar, who looked after KNB, Apli Shala and the outreach programme, I was free to take part in the ferment that led up to the drafting of the National Curriculum Framework of 2005. There were one or two heady years when we were going around the country attending meetings in Delhi, Hyderabad, Mysore, and other places. We were supremely confident that our work would have an impact on the conduct of elementary education in the country !



OC1 VOL V of VI/OCT 2009

OC1 FIRST LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY
VOLUME V
Introduction
Unit V

Course Teachers:
Maxine Berntsen
Jane Sahi

M.A. IN EDUCATION (ELEMENTARY) PROGRAMME
CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEONAR, MUMBAI 400 088
Email: cpgedu.tiss@gmail.com
Ph: 91-22-25525305

First Language Pedagogy coursebook (Source: Personal Collection)

Shortly afterwards, Dr. Padma Sarangapani organized a series of meetings to chalk out the proposed Master of Arts in Elementary Education programme (M.A. EE) at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Jane Sahi and I were given the responsibility for designing an optional course in the First Language Pedagogy, and had two whole years to read, study and put the course together. Back home in KNB, from 2000 to 2003, the India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) gave us funds for a project on structuring an Arts Education Programme. KNB worked in collaboration with the Revachand Bhojwani Academy (RBA) in Pune. The project gave teachers and students a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to have a variety of art experiences: workshops for learning various genres including Madhubani and Warli painting, field visits to schools, creative writing camps. Students and teachers interacted with artists from various fields, including visual arts, music, dance, drama and literature. Seven teachers from KNB and seven from RBA also visited Santiniketan.

Our students spent some time at RBA and the RBA students at KNB. The exchange helped to bridge the socio-cultural gap between the students from the two schools. The project ended with an exhibition and programme that was presented both in Phaltan and in Pune. The programme titled '*Manav ki Kahani* ' attempted to depict the struggle of humankind to supplant violence with peace.

All these experiences of the NCF, M.A. EE and IFA stimulated our imagination and opened up the vision of new possibilities.

Centre for Language Literacy and Communcation (CLLC)

A casual exchange between Amrita Patwardhan of the Sir Ratan Tata Trust (SRTT) and myself, prompted me to share with Amrita my dream of a new undertaking: a centre for language and literacy. I thought of it as a unit that would function under the aegis of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (PSS), at least for the time being. The SRTT approved the proposal for the first phase, and later on for the second phase of the project, which was named the Centre for Language Literacy and Communication (CLLC).

The mandate of the CLLC was to address two of the major questions with regard to language in elementary education in India. Our proposal included direct intervention in government schools, fellowships for established scholars and for teachers, teacher internships, production of books and films, development of a library on early literacy, development of a website, translation of seminal works on language and child development into Marathi, and promoting public discussion on government policy in regard to language education.

The first year of the work of the CLLC was showcased in a program organised in Phaltan on April 28th, 2010. More than 125 persons attended the function including members of the Pragat Shikshan Sanstha's governing council, directors and members of the advisory committee of CLLC, eminent academicians, representatives of SRTT and Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (SDTT), representatives of various NGOs and private schools, teachers and staff of the PSS as well as other well-wishers and friends.

CLLC Program (Source: PSS)

Despite the blistering heat, the audience listened attentively to the presentations, some of which were in Hindi and others in Marathi and English. The programme was compered by Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar who impressed all with her effortless switching between English, Marathi and Hindi.

I remember with particular pleasure Mini Shrinivasan talking about her senior fellowship study of the experience of Lamani girls in Pune Municipal Corporation schools. The girls who belonged to a nomadic tribal community, were not ill-treated in any way; they were simply ignored because the teachers felt that the girls had no interest in education, and in any case would be leaving school very early in order to get married. One of Mini's most significant observations was that girls who talked volubly and freely on seeing a friendly face, scored zero on tests of oral competence.

A Lamani Tanda
(Source: Mini Shrinivasan)

The presentations on the teacher fellowships were undoubtedly one of the most impressive parts of the programme. The reports covered a variety of topics: Varsha Lalge, a mathematics teacher from KNB talked about preparing a glossary of terms for teaching geometry: Kamala Vasudev from Sita School in Bengaluru talked about language and communication issues integrating the teaching of health, life processes and exercise: Nandlal and Pukhraj Mali from Rajasthan talked about their comparative study of the reading and writing processes of beginning level readers in the age group of 5-6 years and 12-16 years. Their conclusion was that the older girls had more difficulties in learning.

Kamala Vasudeva - Brainstorming with children about health
(Source: Sita School)

I was particularly interested in a study done by Shradda Sangle, a teacher in the PSS Apli Shala Balwadi. She talked about her experience in bridging social distances by using bilingualism in the balwadi. It was gratifying to hear that after some time the children started socializing with one another and were even making bilingual puns.

A highlight of the program was the inauguration of the CLLC website. Prakash Anbhule, who had designed the website started by saying that in the past year he had become a father twice — once of his son Tanmay and then of the CLLC website.

CLLC website launch (Source: PSS)

In one of the concluding sessions Zakiya Kurrien talked about the teaching of reading in mainstream primary schools. She argued that children's failure to read fluently by the end of class 2 is due to limited or faulty pedagogy rather than poverty or malnutrition. Perhaps the most striking part of Ms. Kurrien's presentation was the information she gave about what cognitive neuroscience tells us about the reading process. She explained how the working memory can hold information for only about twelve seconds. This means that to understand a sentence the mind must read it fast enough to capture it within this time limit.

The evening session also included a moving interlude in which Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar's book *Mulanche Srujanatmak Likhan* (Children's Creative Writing) was released by Prakash Halbe, who had been Dr. Nimbkar's teacher in Mudhoji High School, Phaltan.

Film and library

Sri Kumbha - The teacher in the stream
(Source: Personal Collection)

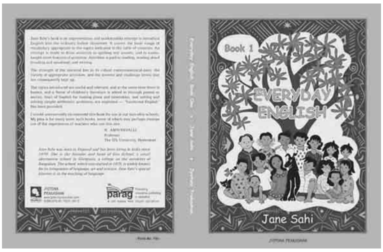
I also recall the experience of Jane Sahi's scripting and directing 'Here is a Tree', a film on teaching of English in rural schools. One teacher in particular had a natural gift for relating to children. He could wade in a stream, pick up a crab, or a handful of goat droppings. He was joyful and caring, and could make jokes at his own expense in order to keep the classroom atmosphere lively.

In the film there is a memorable scene. The children are putting on a play in which a *rajah* has eaten a parrot who had ventured into his garden. As the *rajah* lay on the table, the parrot's mate tickled the *rajah*'s nose. Then to the amazement of all of us, the *rajah* falls off the table - the children's addition to the script.

Evaluation of project

The amount of work accomplished during the CLLC project was phenomenal and much of it was of a very high quality. The library collection of books on early literacy is perhaps one of the most long lasting contributions of this project. Though the collection is small I believe that it is unmatched in India.

The Early Literacy Initiative conducted by Dr. Neelima Gokhale was a major contribution. Through this initiative the earlier focus in the PSS balwadis on young children's language development was expanded to include the development of written language simultaneously. Along with this, fostering of communication in the classroom was a major goal. These theoretical goals were built by Dr. Gokhale into a solid base of balwadi practise.



Everyday English
(Source: PSS)

In her report the external reviewer noted the vibrant atmosphere found in the balwadis. This observation flies in the face of Western theories that children from non-literate and low-literate backgrounds are doomed to fail – or at least are at the risk of failure – in school. The external review also clearly indicated that the children were learning to read and write in the 1st standard. Similarly for the Everyday English programme the results showed that the students had performed very well.

In my final report on the CLLC I said:

"We are happy to report that, by and large, we have done what we had committed ourselves to doing. In regard to promoting a high level of basic pedagogical issues, we have done something. When it comes to having an impact on government policy, we must confess that we have hit a brick wall. If we temper our expectations with realism, we can be reasonably happy with what has been accomplished, and not unduly disturbed by what we have been unable to do.”

I concluded:

“In this scenario we may have to be content with only small victories, or simply the knowledge that we have done our best. At the same time we cannot lose sight of the larger vision. We do have promises to keep.”

Moving on

Despite my reference to the promises we still had to keep, I had a number of doubts. To begin with, I was now 76 years old and my level of energy was not what it had been two or three years earlier. In the previous year much of my time had gone into administration, which had never been my forte. In addition, Dr. Manjiri Nimbkar and Dr. Neelima Gokhale were doing significant work in Early Childhood Education and Emergent Literacy. Given the limited resources of the PSS – both in terms of personnel and funds – it was only fair that they be given free range to develop their vision.

I decided that I needed to move on. Dr. Padma Sarangapani told me on the phone that a new branch of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences was being developed in Hyderabad, and they wanted me to help train a new generation of language experts.

I went to Mumbai for an interview, and in a short time I was appointed Professor Emerita in the Centre for Education in TISS Hyderabad.

Return to Hyderabad

In March 1963, some months before I left Hyderabad, I had written the following lines in my diary.

> Astonishingly beautiful smell in compound now.
> Jasmines
> About to bloom but smell
> Already there. Bulbul and cuckoo
> Started to come – 5. 30 a.m.
> Already sick with homesickness
> In this place. Don't know how
> I can bear to go.

Now, 49 years later, I was back in the same house. *Aee* and *Bhau* had passed away, but their son Dr. Ramkrishna and his wife Dr. Suniti were living there, and they took me in. Even before leaving Phaltan I had received a letter from Gauramavshi, *Aee*'s youngest sister, expressing her happiness that I was returning.

Dr. Ramkrishna Satwalekar and Dr. Suniti Satwalekar.
(Source: Satwalekar family)

It was decided that I would stay with Ramkrishna and Suniti for a month, while my room at TISS was being made ready. The Institute was temporarily being housed in rented space on the campus of APARD – the Andhra Pradesh Academy of Rural Development, and I was to be given a room at the APARD hostel.

I had a room of about 14' x 12', with an attached bathroom. In one corner on a small computer table were my kitchen appliances – an induction stove, a hot kettle and a toaster. It was a far cry from the bungalow I had built in Phaltan and had lived in for 30 years.

The hostel was on the edge of the campus, with well-kept gardens on one side, and scrub woodland on the other. There was a notice on the door of my room to beware of wild boars. I never saw one, though once or twice I heard reports of boars being sighted on the campus. I loved looking out of the window at my little bit of jungle, where occasionally I saw a pair of mongoose scampering one after the other, or a mother quail followed by her chicks. Once I saw a paradise flycatcher unbelievably wrapping itself around a slender tree.

The original idea was that I would stay in the hostel for about three months, until one of the old bungalows on campus was renovated as faculty housing. That plan fell through but I decided that I would stay in the hostel. The closed campus provided security, people came to clean, and I could walk to my office in ten minutes.

My second floor office looked out over the tree tops. A short ways away was a temple with an image of Hanuman that I could glimpse through the trees. It called to mind the poem I had written to *Aee* years before, with the line, 'Let me be Hanuman'. A reminder that I had come full circle.

Some months later there was yet another reminder. I was standing outside my new office which had my name plate on it. Just then Dr. Hargopal came by. He looked up at my name plate and said that he recalled having a professor with that same name at Vivek Vardhini College many years ago. I said "That was me !"

There was a lot of excitement in starting the new Centre for Education. We had a three day high profile meeting at Golkonda

Spa to discuss the vision of the centre. My colleagues and I felt that we were breaking new ground. We had a chance to develop any number of courses, though there was always a question about where we were going to get funds or the required number of faculty members to teach them.

We began with the M.Phil. programme. I developed a course called 'Looking at Language'. My class was just a handful of students; we met around a conference table. Almost all of them were former students of the M.A. EE program at TISS, Mumbai. They were mature, experienced and highly motivated. Teaching them was a joy.

The following year the M.A program started. I found it exciting to read and learn new things. I became particularly interested in the work of Michael Tomasello, a developmental psychologist who is working on cognition and communication in humans and other higher primates.

I developed a course entitled 'Understanding Language', which has been approved as a compulsory two credit course for first year students in the M.A. in Education programme. I feel convinced that a proper grasp of the nature of language from a cognitive point of view serves as a basis for an understanding of symbolization, human development, social justice and the links between language, identity and power.

From the outset Dr. Lakshmi Lingam, Deputy Director of TISS Hyderabad, and the faculty have wanted to ensure that the School of Education should not be merely an ivory tower but a dynamic centre for improvement of education, particularly in the state. One of the projects that has been mooted from early on is the development of a school on the campus that TISS Hyderabad is planning to develop at Kothur, a village in Mahboobnagar District. In 2012, Dr. Ritesh Khunyakari and I visited Kothur and then later prepared a power point presentation on issues regarding the proposed school. Subsequently, I wrote a couple of chapters on the concept of the school. However, the development of the new campus has been delayed and to the best of my knowledge not much more work has been done about the concept of the school.

Several years ago, in consultation with SRTT, we drew up an ambitious proposal for an Early Literacy Initiative. I had a major part in conceptualizing the theoretical aspects. Only recently the project was approved by SRTT, and it will start in earnest in January of the coming year.

Another proposal that has been hanging fire for some time is for working with the State Residential Schools for Scheduled Caste children. We have had a number of initial discussions and visits, and are hoping that we can assist these schools in improving the teaching of mathematics and English.

It is not only in the Social Welfare Schools that English is a problem. In TISS Hyderabad itself one of our greatest challenges has been how to assist students who are coping with the problem of mastering conversational English on the one hand and the reading and writing of academic English on the other. This basic issue confronts not only TISS, but practically all institutions of higher education in the country. Students coming from regional language medium schools often have deep knowledge of society and culture, but feel defeated in their efforts to cope with their studies in a language they do not know well.

As the rules of the University Grants Commission do not permit hiring of persons of age 80 and above on a full time basis I am continuing my teaching at TISS Hyderabad with the status of a visiting faculty member. It is understood that I will have some role as a consultant in the Early Literacy Initiative.

In addition I have a number of unfinished projects to work on - especially the Reader for First Language Pedagogy that Jane Sahi and I are doing and the book, "Sharda: A Mahar Woman's Path to Selfhood", which I nearly completed 30 years ago. An article on some aspects of the story was published some years ago. It is presented here.

Sharda
A mahar womans path to selfhood

Psychosocial strength we conclude depends
on a total process which regulates individual
life cycles the sequence of generations and
the structure of society simultaneously for all
of them have evolved together.
Eric H. Erikson[1]

The women's studies unit of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences has been preparing a series of books on various aspects of Maharastrian women's lives. My study which is a part of this project is an oral history of Sharda a young Mahar woman as seen through interviews with her parents her brother and her grandparents. When I asked Sharda for the story of her life, what I got was the story of her marriage at the age of nine to a youth of 16 – a marriage that continued to exist psychologically long after it had in fact ceased to be.[2] In the interviews which were spread out over a couple of years, we see Sharda struggling to cope with the crisis of not being acknowledged by her husband, and in the course of this struggle we can see the growth of her independent sense of identity. The themes

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1) Although this paper and the full length study on which it is based are completely non –technical, they are informed by the work of Eric H. Erikson, especially his Identity: Youth and Crisis (New York: Norton 1968). I have also been stimulated by Robert Kegans's The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development (Cambridge: Harward University Press 1982)

2) I am indebted to Gina Hollomann for this formulation

in this story echo many of those that have come up repeatedly in this volume.

Sharda began her story like this:

"I'll begin from the time I began to understand. I was in the third grade. At that time I must have been nine or ten years old. From then on I remember clearly. At that time I was married. It was in the month of May. I had just passed the third grade exam and I was married and I was married in May. From then on I went to stay at my in-laws."

Though her own parents were poor, in their home she at least had enough to eat. In her in-laws' home she often went hungry.

"I would cry and cry for food. Sometimes we would go hungry all day long. Then I would tell my parents we were half-starved. My parents would say, "let it be. It'll be that way until your husband starts to earn." Sometimes I'd stay a while at my parents' home. I'd stay in order to get enough to eat (her voice tearing at the initial syllable of *khanayasathi*, "in order to eat"). Then my parents would send me back. My in-laws felt that I shouldn't go to my parents, but I'd go nevertheless. I'd spend three months there and two months here. When I was a child that's how it went on."

Along with her frequent stays at her parents' home, another source of conflict was her family's attempt to continue her education. Her father, who had been inspired by Ambedkar[3] to educate his children, was anxious to have her in school. After several years during which she went to school off and on, her father finally sent her to Hingne, the girls' school at the ashram founded by Maharishi Karve on the outskirts of Pune. Sharda's remarks suggest that while at Hingne she began to feel that the school and its environs were preparing her for a very different kind of life, indeed a different identity from that she had been born to:

"Then I began to realize that my getting an education, getting a job wouldn't go down well with our people and wouldn't be suitable. It didn't seem right to me either. Here they say - my friends would say - "you'll get an education, get a job, but finally what are you going to do? Finally you'll have to look after your home and family." My friends were older, so they'd talk like this. Hearing this, I felt they were right: finally what am I going to do ?"

There were emotional pressures too – although she did not speak of them directly in this first interview. Sharada apparently had had sexual relations with her husband one or more times in the few months before going to Hingne, and she deeply longed to go

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3) Editor's note: Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a twentieth-century reformer politician who was influential on the national level and especially among the Mahar Untouchables of Maharashtra. Toward the end of his life, Ambedkar initiated a mass conversion of the Mahars to Buddhism.

back to him. When her school discovered that she was married they wrote to her husband asking him to come to see Sharda. During his visit her friends contrived to distract the matron, and gave the young couple a chance to come together in her hostel room. The memory of that union she treasures to this day.

When the school term was over she returned to her in-laws', expecting that, now that she was sexually mature, she would live in harmony with her husband and his family. Though she found moments of happiness, she was often beaten by her jealous husband.

"He would be loving, and he would beat me too. Both side by side. A little anger, a little love. And one thing, he was very suspicious. When he got suspicious he would say anything.… he wouldn't let me talk to any man. I should just sit at home and have nothing to do with anybody but him."

Despite her husband's mistreatment she was very much in love with him. When her father came and took her home for a festival she waited eagerly for her husband to come and take her back. But months went by and he did not come.

"I had stayed at home for six months waiting for him to come at least once. Then my brother's wedding was fixed. We sent invitations for the wedding, and my parents promised they would give a suit of clothes to my husband. I was very happy. I thought once he's been pleased everything will be all right. We sent invitation, but he didn't come. When I saw he hadn't come I was crushed: now he's never going to come."

She described how she had literally taken matters into her own hands.

"Within a month after that I saw him here in town. When I saw him I told him right out in the middle of the *chowk*, "take me with you, don't keep me here." But he wouldn't listen, wouldn't speak. Finally I had to grab his hand. I said to him plainly, "if you don't come I'll drag you home. I'll drag you home, and in front of everybody I'll tell you to take me back." When he came to my parents' home he sat down and ate, agreed to take me, then got up saying he had to go to the toilet, and he hasn't come back since."

By this time she must have been about 16. For several more years she kept trying to see her husband, but at last she began to face the truth.

"Finally I decided it's no use to live depending on him, or to expect anything from him. So I got a diploma in sewing."

She began doing sewing at home and after a time, with the help of her family, she opened a tailor shop. A year or so later, as her business was becoming established, she was hit within a few days by a double blow.

"In our town there was a caste riot. Because of that all the shops of the Harijans were burned. My shop was also burned. At that time it was two years since I had left my in-laws. Shortly after my shop was burned I heard that my husband was about to get married. After hearing this - already having heard the shop was burned - I would black out. I was half-mad. When I try resolutely to go ahead in life, some blow hits me."

At first she accepted her husband's remarriage with philosophical resignation, feeling that this definitely meant the end of their marriage. However, a chance meeting with the new wife made her consider the possibility of living as a co-wife.

"Even though he had married a second time I was ready to live contentedly in his house."

About this time her father-in-law died. Sharda went and stayed with the family for two days and was treated as an honored guest. Thus encouraged, a month later she went back to stay, but this time they beat her and drove her out.

Listening to her, I was now completely baffled. "Why did you feel this way ? Up till now he had not shown you any compassion or love. Why did you want to stay with him ?" Sharda struggled to impose a logic on her own inner contradictions:

"Your parents don't stay with you till the end. And this country is such that society makes you bad[4] - no matter how good a person you may be. Of course, a person whose thoughts are pure pays no attention to society; she behaves properly according to her own rights. Because I've lived this way I have survived. Still I felt there is a custom of having more than one wife[5], so I can live like that. I assumed that, but they wouldn't accept it. So they beat me and drove me out."

Since she had lost all hope of being reconciled with her husband she started asking her parents to get her married to someone else. She explained to me why she felt remarriage was a necessity.

"Even though you want to live independently you need to have someone with you. You can't live alone. That's the way here. Without that, it's no go. Even though I say I'll live alone, the world won't let me. So I'd quarrel with my family about this. My family's response was, "What you say is right, but think it through. Because until now you were talking about your first husband. Now why are

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4) This is a difficult statement to interpret. "Bad" means "sexually loose." I think what she is saying is that society assumes that any unattached woman is sexually loose, and by its attitude forces a woman to actually become so- a self-fulfilling prophecy , as it were.

5) Traditionally many Hindu men have had more than one wife. Bigamy was outlawed in Bombay state (of which Sharda's village was a part) in 1946, but is still common.

you asking us to get you married again?”

Her husband was equally ambivalent. At this critical juncture he sent a message that he was in the hospital on intravenous saline[6] and she should come at once. Involved in a family quarrel about the shop, Sharda was late in going to the hospital, and by the time she arrived, her husband had been discharged. She went to his house, but he refused to speak to her. She stayed at his aunt’s for two days but he wouldn’t come there either. Once again she forced a confrontation in the bazaar.

“Then I went to the bazaar, thinking, I’ll meet him secretly (she uses the English word), talk to him, and ask him, “Have you made up your mind? You call for me, and when I come you won’t speak to me.” So I went to the bazaar. He wouldn’t speak to me. “I don’t know you and I’m not married to you. Don’t come to me again.” Since then I’ve never gone to him, nor seen him, nor spoken to him. And now at last I have decided to live my life alone, with determination and courage, up to the last moment, to serve society, to overcome whatever obstacles come my way, and to live life alone, independently. That’s all.”

This last statement is brave, but a bit tremulous. A year later, when I again interviewed Sharda, she had mastered her despair.

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6) Giving a patient intravenous saline and glucose is extraordinarily common, perhaps because patients demand it. Generally the next day the patient is up and about. Undoubtedly the procedure has a certain dramatic effect, both on the patient and on his relatives.

When I asked what dreams she had, she said she had none.

"I've become hardened to all happiness. Now I've gained the power to digest sorrow."

I reminded her that she had told me earlier that nothing was hers, everything was her brother's. Then I asked, "What in life is yours? Where do you find meaning in living ?" She gave an astonishing answer.

"That I am. This is the whole meaning of life. That I want all this - all that - that is meaningless. This is what I have come to understand." I asked about remarriage. She said, "No."

"Once that was shattered I hardened myself about everything in life. I don't want it. Once something like that has happened I don't want to go down that road again."

I reminded her that she had said that society will not let a woman live alone.

"It's true that society will not let a woman live alone in peace. But if a woman behaves according to the social opinion, according to society, she's finished right there. This is my personal opinion. If she staunchly goes her own way society can't do anything and social opinion can't do anything."

COMMENT

Sharda's story raises several questions. First of all, Sharda was born into the Mahar caste, the largest of the formerly Untouchable caste of Maharashtra. Among Mahars (and in fact, among the majority of non-Brahman castes) it is extremely common for a woman to be abandoned by her husband. Such women usually remarry, often in a common- law arrangement. We ask ourselves, then, why Sharda was so persistent in her struggle to be acknowledged as this man's wife? A related question is: why did her husband refuse to take her as his wife?

These questions perhaps suggest answers cast in terms of personal psychology, but my attempt here will be to look briefly at the social context of Sharda's personal crisis. To understand her story we must recognize that Sharda, her husband, and their families were all caught in the confusions of social change. Both families were striving to move upward socially. The marriage of a nine-year-old Sharda to a youth of about 16 is in itself an indication of that, for child marriage was not traditional among the Mahars, and was practiced by those families who wished to imitate the Brahman custom (a custom which the majority of the Brahmans had abandoned by the time of Sharda's marriage). Her husband's family's aspirations were quite limited, however, and their expectation was that Sharda would become a permanent member of the household immediately, and would live with her husband as soon as it was physically possible. As they saw it, her going to Hingne meant she had broken the marriage.

Sharda's parents, on the other hand, had a more ambitious vision of their daughter's future. They wanted her to get an education, but were unaware that this goal was in direct conflict with her getting married at the age of nine.

Sharda, on her part, in the process of being socialized (whether at home, in elementary school, or at Hingne, it is hard to say) imbibed the "high caste" ideology of the women's role, an ideology wholly antithetical to the casual common-law divorce and remarriage practiced in her own caste. When I asked her about the social meaning of marriage, Sharda summed up this ideology.

"The social meaning you can say is this: that there is a tradition here that once a girl's parents have gotten her married that man is her all-in-all for the rest of her life. There is nothing beyond that."

Here, I think, we have the explanation for Sharda's long struggle. Being this man's wife was what gave meaning to her life-at least from the age of 15 onwards. When she and her husband came together at Hingne for a brief moment there was complete consonance between her emotional needs and the ideological demands of society: she was a wife. A few months later the marriage ceased to be, for all practical purposes; Sharda continued to cling to it because her identity was entirely constructed around wifehood. For years she risked insult and injury to defend her identity as a wife, and was even prepared to accept being a co-wife. But finally she faced the reality that the marriage had irrevocably ended, and some years later she was able to affirm her independent existence.

"That I am. This is the whole meaning of life. That I want all this - all that - that is meaningless. This is what I have come to understand."

This is an affirmation of liberation, though it is not liberation in the Western feminist sense of rejecting the woman's traditional role. To Sharda the ideal woman is still wife and mother.

"A woman who is happily married - her duty is to stay right at home and take care of her happy household (*samsar*)."

The question of the ideal woman was very much on Sharda's mind. At the close of our last interview, after I had turned off the tape recorder, she indicated that she wanted to say more. I restarted the machine and she spoke. "Mother is an ideal woman, isn't she ?" "You mean your mother ?" I asked.

"I mean anybody's mother. The word "mother" has nothing to compare it to. Because mother is an ideal . [Struggling] Because in the house, in the family, in the *samsar*, she is chief in everything. She looks after everything – the children, their father. Everything is dependent on her."

It takes a kind of strength and integrity for a woman to admit that she cannot be wife and mother and still hold these roles as her ideal. The exploration of Sharda's sources of strength is the aim of my book length study of her history. The development of the work-ethic and vocational skills among her parents and grandparents, the influence of the Mahanubhav Panth, the Mahar legacy, the impact of Ambedkar and the Buddhist conversion: all these formed the strands of Sharda's history and identity and provided the strength she needed to cope with her crisis and grow in selfhood.

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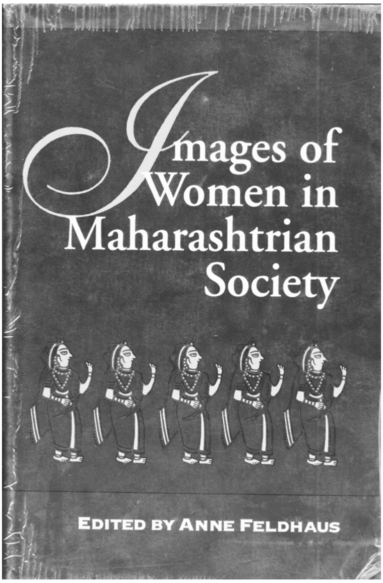

Images of Women in Maharashtrian Society
(Source : SUNY Press)

Some final reflections

Looking back at this time that has elapsed since my return to Hyderabad in 2012 it is hard to imagine how I would have survived without the support of friends and colleagues. In TISS, Dr. Ritesh Khunyakari and his mother; Dr.Jayasree Subramanian; Dr. Murali Krishna and his wife Dr. Swati Margaret and their son Jolly, gave me friendship and often provided meals at lunch time. My greatest debt is to the Satwalekar family. During the time I was living in a hostel, I spent almost every weekend in their home. Now I have moved into Vasathi Anandi, a gated community nine kms from TISS. And miraculously, Ram and Suniti will be moving into a new villa only five minutes from where I live.

It is not the Hyderabad I left 52 years ago but there are continuities. From my new apartment I can look out of the window and see the Deccan rocks which I always loved.

I spoke about things coming to a full circle. In discussing this with Jane, she commented, "It is not so much of a circle as a spiral". And she is right. In the process of putting together these memories I have realized that it is not simply that my life in India started in Hyderabad and now I have come a full circle. There has been a constant spiralling back or interweaving of people and places from my childhood to the present day. My brother Gary and friend Shelby in the U.S., my cousin Bernt in Norway and Shirish Kavadi in Pune have provided facts and photographs. The PSS office in

Phaltan has provided support. Nanda Nanavare, my housekeeper for forty years, is still helping me in setting up my new home.

Perhaps the best example of spiralling is my experience with Prakash Anbhule. He came to us as a child who would not stay in the municipal school because the teacher was a bully. Prakash joined our first batch of students in KNB. From the start he was a gifted poet and later became a largely self taught expert in computers and communication technology. Since the time I left Phaltan he has looked after my affairs there, and has provided photographic material for this book.

Prakash Anbhule
(Source: PSS)

In the making of this book I have received support from Niju Mohan, Dr. Fernando Noronha, Ajaa Sharma and Shirly Joseph.

The contribution of Sujata Noronha and Jane Sahi is impossible to describe - from the original conception to the meticulous details of bringing out this book in record time. Their dedication, sensitivity and professionalism are beyond belief.

So to all those who have had a part in the journey of my life, I express my profound gratitude and deepest love.

Maxine Berntsen
September 2015

प्रगत शिक्षण संस्था, फलटण

MRP ₹ 300

ISBN 978-81-923042-5-0

Bookworm